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*BY*

PETER MUIR

*NEW YORK • 1940*

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A

*Respectfully dedicated to the women of  
France, and especially to Josette, whose  
example of indomitable courage helped me  
through dark moments.*





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## PART 3

*ESCAPE*

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## CAPTURE



## CHAPTER I

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### PRISONERS OF THE NAZIS

THE long column of khaki-clad soldiers moved slowly in the direction of Étampes. First came the Belgians. Their attempt to sing and whistle was a miserable failure. Then came the French infantry. Their attempt to show indifference was equally a failure. On the faces of the troops from Morocco and Tunis one saw only a complete lack of emotion. But the German guards attempted to show great efficiency—and succeeded.

This was in the early morning of June 18, 1940. Herbert de Belle and I walked along with the officers at the head of the French infantry. We did not say much. Probably we were thinking the same things: Why the hell did we have to run square into that advanced column the day before on the north bank of the Loire, near Blois? What in hell can you do when you are driving at full speed and come around a curve and find yourself looking into

the barrels of five machine-guns and one anti-tank gun manned by Boche storm troops?

Well, we *had* run square into the enemy, and after they popped a few bullets past our ears we had done the only logical thing—surrendered. And that was that. Last week has never interested me very much, I am always too busy thinking of next. We were prisoners, and now how to get out of it?

For the moment escape was impossible. On either side of us, as far as the eye could see, stretched broad wheat fields through which, if one passed, one left an easy trail to follow. There was not a hiding place in sight, and to break and run would be suicide. A railroad line stretched parallel to the road on our left, and we could see army bread in one of the freight cars that stood there without an engine. A French soldier started to run across the field to fetch some bread, but was quickly stopped by a guard who clipped off heads of wheat on either side of him with an automatic pistol.

No, the time had definitely not yet come to get away. It would, I knew, and until then we must be patient. A false move now and our chances would be hurt, if not entirely ruined. So I walked

along, automatically placing one rather heavy, booted foot before the other, and let my thoughts wander back over the past twenty-four hours.

Twenty-four hours that seemed like weeks. A month to the day since I had led Section One of the American Field Service to the front, a month that seemed like years. I wondered what the Section was thinking of our disappearance the day before. Probably that we had been killed. Or perhaps they had guessed the right answer. Harold Willis would automatically take over my command. I wasn't worried about that. I was worried about the four ambulances and their drivers (Stehlin, Rich, McElwain, and Thorensen) whom I had left on the north bank of the Loire in the morning. Had they also fallen into German hands? Or worse?

On the disastrous retreat from Amiens and Beauvais, the Section had followed its French command step by step until now it found itself on the southern side of the Loire. That morning, after taking the four cars to their post I had returned to camp. There was bad news. Pétain had made his famous speech asking Germany's terms for peace. Up to that time we had hoped against hope that the

French would hold somewhere, perhaps here. Now it could be only a matter of days before the end came. But until then there would be fighting. As if to remind us that it was not over, Nazi planes flew up and down the river dropping bombs and machine-gunning. We could see them from our camp, but they left us alone.

At lunch a French officer told us that the Germans were on the north bank of the Loire. More rumors. I didn't believe him and laughed at the idea. I had just been well on the other side only a few hours before. Nothing more than wild rumors, of which there were plenty in circulation. Nevertheless, the idea worried me. What about my four men?

By three o'clock I had thought so much about their safety that I could not stand it any longer. I must go and see for myself. Herbert de Belle offered to accompany me, and I accepted. He was a driver, but he was also my friend. There was no question of rank amongst us, and I never gave orders. It wasn't necessary. There were too many volunteers for every job, and the more dangerous the job the more numerous the volunteers.

Soldiers from the French aviation, machine-guns



mounted, guarded both ends of the bridge at Chaumont when we passed over it. "You see," I said to de Belle. "No Heinies here. I knew they couldn't have penetrated this far." "No," he answered, "not yet."

On the far side of the bridge we turned to the right. The powerful staff car, which I was driving, ran particularly well, thanks to the airplane gas we had found that morning at a deserted Royal Air Force dump, and I let it out. We passed a sentry who tried to stop us and yelled something about *les Boches* as we raced by. Off to the east several German planes circled high, and we thought he was warning us that they were there. Bah! I cursed them as I saw great columns of smoke rising where their bombs had fallen and set fire to a village.

"Heads up!" de Belle shouted as we swung around a corner. But it was too late. They had us. They could have blown us off the road if they had wished to. It was the red cross I had had painted on my left mudguard a few days before that saved us, I think. I do not believe that the Germans fire purposely on the red cross, although in their bombings they hit a great many.

The crossroads must have been taken only a few

moments before. Blood was still running freely from the many corpses all around us in grotesque positions, and it is easy for an experienced eye to tell the difference between a fresh corpse and one that has been lying about some time. These were fresh, and were evenly divided between civilians and French soldiers. I saw no German dead. From a wood beside us light artillery barked incessantly at our friends across the Loire.

Herbert and I slowly and mechanically obeyed the German officer's curt command to get down from the car. Our capture had been so sudden that we did not yet understand just what had happened. Only when they were searching us for arms did I begin to realize that we were in a nasty spot.

"Who are you?" the officer barked. I explained that I was in command of an American ambulance section, and that de Belle was my second in command. This was not true, but I understood that officers received better treatment when they were captured, and I wanted my friend to stay with me and get the best of what was coming to us. As it happened there was no difference made on account of rank as long as we remained prisoners.

"Let me see your papers." While he carefully thumbed through our passports I looked around at the German soldiers who were mounting the guns. It was impossible not to admire their perfect equipment and the efficiency with which they handled it. Their movements were mechanical, and they worked with the precision of a Swiss watch. One had the impression that they had been trained mentally, morally, and physically from childhood for this moment when their leader would give the order to overrun Europe—perhaps the world. I studied every face, from the officer's down, and saw cold blue eyes, cruel and determined, and felt then that no army existed capable of stopping this field-gray horde on land, once it got a foothold. Their faces were hard, their expressions far from kind as they examined us, and I knew that a word from the officer would spell our end. I also knew that these fast-moving attack columns rarely took prisoners. They hadn't the time.

If de Belle was nervous he did not show any signs of it. He gazed calmly about, taking in our surroundings, seemingly without emotion, good soldier that he was. Inwardly what he was going

through I could not guess. My own heart was thumping so hard that I felt sure it could be heard over the shelling.

"What are you doing here?" The officer had finished studying our passports and returned them. Once again I explained that we headed an ambulance section. "But you are on the French side. Why are you not on our side?" I pointed out, as well as my limited German would allow, that in the first place the Nazis did not want foreigners serving with their army, and in the second place we handled wounded regardless of nationality. "At Beauvais and Amiens," I said, "we carried a good many Germans, and they received the same treatment as any one else." Either this explanation satisfied him, or he was too busy to bother with us further and did not wish to have us shot. He gave orders to a younger officer and a convoy was quickly formed.

To me he said, "You are prisoners of war." "How dull you are," I thought. "I suspected that some time ago." But I said nothing, and walked over to a motorcycle side-car which was designated to transport me. On it were seated two armed soldiers. My friend was in a similar machine behind

me, followed by two mounted machine-guns and my staff car, driven by a German. Leading this impressive convoy was the young officer in a car filled with armed guards. Never in my life had I felt so important and dangerous as when we moved, engines roaring, up the road towards the north.

We passed the kilometer posts along the road so fast that it was impossible to see where the convoy was going. The general direction was Paris, although it seemed doubtful that they would take us that far. Dust and dirt and wind cut our faces and brought a stream of tears from my eyes. I looked back and saw that de Belle was also weeping, but he managed to give me a wink. Our captors wore goggles and were protected.

In a small town—I did not see the name, we had come in so fast—the convoy stopped. Immediately we were surrounded by Nazi soldiers, most of them carrying cameras, and they photographed us from every angle. American prisoners. Perhaps the first they had ever seen, and we created a great stir. The clicking of cameras made me feel more like a Hollywood star than a captive, just as our six-car convoy, roaring along the roads, through towns

and villages, klaxons blowing, had made me think of Jimmy Walker going up Fifth Avenue in the days when he was Mayor.

The young officer was polite and cold. Would we follow him? His superior officers would like to ask some questions. He led us into a house where there was a great deal of heel-clicking and saluting, both in the Nazi and military fashion, and before an officer whom he addressed as Herr something-or-other—colonel, if I remember correctly. The colonel refused my request for an interpreter, saying that my German was good enough. It flattered me to hear that he thought so, and at the same time annoyed me, because I knew that my German was very rusty, to say the least, and that I might slip up and make a mistake that would cause us trouble. A *ja* that should be a *nein*, or vice versa could and probably would place us in a very nasty jam.

However, the questions asked were similar to those put to me back at the crossroads, and I had little trouble answering them. One thing seemed to interest the colonel particularly. "Did you come from America especially to serve France, or were you already living here?" Both de Belle and I had long been residents in that lovely country, and said

so. We did not mention that over half of Section One had made the trip expressly to serve. This seemed to be the answer he wanted, and we were dismissed.

During the next lap of our journey I studied the possibility of throwing our motorcycle into the ditch and running for the woods. At the speed we were travelling the slightest touch on the handlebars would have done the trick. The side-car was on the right, and if I gave a kick on the nearest handlebar it would throw the machine on top of me. The other alternative was to give it a quick jerk, which would throw me on top of the guard and driver. Perhaps in the excitement and melee that would undoubtedly follow, I might escape. What about de Belle? Could he make it? For some miles I toyed with the idea, even lifting my feet up under the hood so that I could get them out quickly. The guard on the rumble-seat to my left was watching closely. He had loosened the pistol in its holster and had his hand on the butt. He would shoot if I made the slightest movement. His eyes told me that, and I dropped my feet back into their proper place. Chances of escape that way were thousands to one against, and although I am

fond of gambling the odds were too strong; so I refused the bet.

Once again the convoy halted and we were led into a house which a sign designated as Army Headquarters. Here de Belle and I were questioned separately and in much greater detail. I was again refused an interpreter on the grounds that my German was good enough, and while I began to think pretty highly of my linguistic abilities I was frankly worried about making slips. When asked what I thought of the war I replied that I didn't know much except what I had seen, and judging from that the Germans seemed to be doing pretty well. What about England? I knew nothing about England, had not been there since I passed on my way to Russia as a member of the American Relief Administration in 1922. I noticed that when my captors spoke of France they appeared quite indifferent, but when they mentioned England their faces grew stern and their eyes filled with an intense hatred. England, then, was their great enemy, and they were determined to destroy it.

All my papers, including personal letters and photographs, were taken from my pockets and examined minutely. When they had finished, my



money and passport were returned. The rest I must give up. Also, the uniform intrigued them. It was cut like that of a British officer, yet I wore French decorations and on my lapels were the green felt backgrounds mounted with silver bombs of the French transport. "The decorations," I explained, "are from the last war, a Croix de Guerre with two citations, and a service medal." "What were you doing in the last war?" I told them the same thing as in this, only instead of being in command of a section I was a driver. The lapel bombs were the insignia of the 19th Train, as they probably knew, and as we were attached to it during our service we wore the insignia as a compliment. We were, however, not French soldiers in any sense of the word. Joining any army would mean loss of citizenship, in which case the American Government would have withdrawn my passport. "Are you a volunteer?" "Yes." "Were you a volunteer in the other war?" "Yes." "Why is your uniform cut like that of a British officer?" I had to admit that I did not know the answer to this one. "They are the same uniforms that the American Field Service wore in the last war," was all that I could tell them. "Why has your friend a French name?" I sup-

posed that he was of French origin, as Americans are a mixture of many names and races. "I know that," the questioning officer said, rather scornfully. "Then why the hell did you ask me?" I retorted.

This was a bad break and cost me my Sam Browne belt, which he ordered taken off me before I was sent from the room. And when I said I was thirsty and asked that I be allowed to fetch my water canteen from the staff car this was refused on the grounds that I had been impertinent to a German officer. Well, that was some satisfaction, although it did not slake my thirst.

When we left this point I noticed that the staff car was missing from the convoy. This was a blow, though not unexpected, as some one had remarked on the fact that it bore a French Army license plate, and was therefore enemy war material subject to confiscation. Nevertheless my heart sank. As long as the familiar car trailed along behind I held to a faint hope that we might be freed. Now with our only means of transportation gone that hope dwindled. And the loss of my Sam Browne belt angered me. There was no need for this added insult. I felt undressed without it. As soon as I

could get to Paris I would have Hermes cut me another, even a better one, war or no war. I mulled this over in my mind so much that it became a sort of point of honor with me, and took on a great importance in my imagination. I *must* get back to Paris and order another belt to spite this damned fellow, and it must come from the same shop where the one he had stolen came from, perhaps the finest leather shop in the world. I'd show him that he couldn't take my belt off and get away with it. I'd show him. The fact that he would never know didn't occur to me. I guess my brain was getting very tired. And little wonder. The Section had been working under constant shellfire and aerial bombardments, with neither rest nor sleep, since leaving Paris for the Somme front exactly one month ago to the day.

I continued to mutter and curse inwardly, paying no attention to the country we were passing and ignoring the painful dust and dirt that was cutting my face and filling my eyes, until we turned off the road to the left and stopped. Another questioning, I thought, and looked up. Instinctively I stiffened and drew in a quick breath. Before us stretched a broad aviation field entirely surrounded

with barbed-wire fences. Many of the hangars were in shambles from direct hits by bombs. Along the barbed wire at regular intervals stood guards, their rifles over their shoulders. Another guard was smartly opening the gate to admit us. About the grounds unhappy-looking prisoners wandered aimlessly. French, Belgians, dark-skinned colonials herded together like flocks of cattle. And now they were adding another nationality to this polyglot, heterogeneous gathering. Of course, I had expected that we would be thrown into a concentration camp, but the things one expects, when they really happen, are often the most shocking. Herbert caught my eye and made a wry face, at which I was forced to laugh, although I was feeling far from gay. I have a mild dose of claustrophobia, and cannot stand the idea of being shut into any place against my will.

Here, on the inside looking out, we were released. Our convoy drove off at full speed in the direction from which we had come, and the gates were closed. On the far side of the road I could see a sign on which was written ETAMPES 12 KILOMETRES. The arrow pointed towards the north. We could not be more than forty or fifty

miles from Paris. I thought of my belt. If I could not return to the Section, I would get to Paris by some means or other. Damn that officer!

For the first time since our capture, de Belle and I were able to be alone together and talk. We compared notes. On the whole the Germans had not treated him too badly. Once they had knocked his hands out of his pockets when he was talking to a major. How could he know about things like that? He wasn't a military man, he was an actor. "You're a damned good soldier, though," I told him. I had known this before, but the way he took his capture without a word of complaint proved the point.

As darkness fell we were locked in one of the hangars that had not been destroyed by the bombings. It was a cold, dreary place with a few sad and deserted-looking airplanes scattered about haphazardly. There were no floor-boards, no straw, only the damp ground to sleep on, and the night was bitter cold despite the season. We had neither blankets nor overcoats, and de Belle suffered much more than I did. Perhaps his uniform was lighter. He tried once to crawl under the blanket with a Moroccan, but the fellow woke up and pushed him away, muttering curses in his native tongue. After

that we put our backs together and were a little warmer, though still there was no question of sleep. The sounds about us, coming from human lips of hundreds, perhaps thousands of souls in torment, our fellow prisoners, were as varied and eerie as night sounds in a tropical forest. Men, some sleeping and others in a semi-delirious state from privations and mental anguish, called out to their special gods and saints, to their mothers and sisters and sweethearts. Some cursed and blasphemed. French, Flemish, and Arabic could be heard from every corner of the hangar. It was worse than Babel. Only English was missing, for de Belle and I remained silent, listening with a sort of fascination.

At five-thirty the doors were thrown open and we were allowed to go outside. This was a relief. The odors of the hangar had been as varied and disagreeable as the sounds.

At the gate stood the same little guard with whom I had exchanged a few words the night before. He was a Bavarian and quite pleasant. "Good morning, Mr. American," he greeted me. "Good morning, Mr. German." "How did you sleep?" I did not care much for his humor, and answered abruptly, "I didn't." The sleepless night on the

cold, damp ground had not improved my outlook on life, and I saw no signs of even a cup of hot coffee. However, when he gave me a cigarette, the half of which went to de Belle, I softened. "I don't care much about your hotel," I said, half serious and half in banter, wishing to see his reaction. "I think I shall take my leave very shortly." His eyes hardened. "That would be foolish, Mr. American. It would be a pity to be shot now that the war with France is practically over. Besides, every one here is leaving at seven-thirty in column." "Where are we going?" He said that he did not know, and changed the subject.

We spoke of Bavaria, and I told him of my many visits there. The hardness went out of his eyes and he smiled again. Ah yes, he would like to be there again. He had been through the Polish campaign, now the French, and then for the English. The English would be easy. Adolf Hitler had said so, and Adolf Hitler was always right. This use of the double name, I found, was much more common amongst the soldiers than the term Fuehrer, and they pronounced it with much the same reverence a Catholic priest would use when speaking of Jesus Christ. For them this man who had begun life

so modestly, even as the Saviour, had become a sort of god, a super-being to be followed blindly. The guard broke my train of thought with a question. "What do you think of our army?" "Too good," I answered without hesitation. "Too damned good." This pleased him, and he laughed and gave me another cigarette. "Time to fall in," he said. "We are leaving in five minutes."

And so de Belle and I came to be in this long khaki-clad column, moving like a huge snake, slowly and as one body, through the countryside of France towards Étampes.

Herb's nudge brought me back from my mental wanderings. "Look," he said, indicating a signpost. "Paris fifty-two kilometres, Étampes two kilometres. God! If we could only get to Paris." "We will," I answered, without giving the matter much thought.

From time to time the French officers, with whom we found ourselves, walked too fast and caught up with the rear of the Belgian column. Then soldiers from behind would shout for us to drop back. "Don't mix clean napkins with dirty dishrags," they would call out. "Don't walk with those traitors." Feeling was still strong against the



Belgian king for what the French considered treachery and the main reason for their defeat. "Keep away from the swine." The Belgians said nothing, as though they too were ashamed and felt they had been betrayed.

We passed through Étampes and the column was brought to a halt on the far side for a short rest. French refugees shared their bread with us, and gave us bars of chocolate and water. One even gave me a bottle of wine and a whole package of cigarettes. What a people! Surely they did not know where they would be eating on the morrow, and yet they seemed glad to give most of what they had to their defeated army. Even the Belgians were looked after. I knew then that France's greatness would never die, that her true spirit would never be conquered. They had not been able to combat machine power with man power, but France would always be France the Indomitable. The refugees, homeless and often without hope, found kind and encouraging words. This was too much, and I saw bearded, war-bitten soldiers break down and cry.

The little Bavarian guard came up to me, saluted, and said, "Good-by, Mr. American. I am returning

to camp now to wait for another batch of prisoners.”

Bolstered by food and drink and the kind words of the refugees I felt better, and my tired mind began to work furiously. The old guard was leaving. I watched carefully and noted that no particular instructions were given about us to the new guard. Here was our chance. A plan came to me, so simple that I thought it might work. I grabbed de Belle's arm and whispered in his ear, “Follow me, do as I do, and ask no questions.”

A look of understanding came into his intelligent brown eyes, and that was his only answer. We moved across the road from the column, climbed onto the sill of an open window, lit fresh cigarettes, and sat there swinging our legs as unconcernedly as though we were watching a circus parade.

BATTLE IN RETREAT



## CHAPTER II

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### WAR WITHOUT MUSIC

AT THE end of August, 1939, tension ran high in Vichy, where I happened to be. War had not been declared, but even the most optimistic admitted that now it was only a question of days. People fought in the streets for the latest editions of Paris newspapers, radios blared news and political speeches from every house. Groups of men and women gathered in the public gardens, at the drinking fountains and at the bathing establishments to discuss the situation, even momentarily forgetting their cure and their lives.

The season was in full swing and my hotel on the park was filled with clients from many lands. Some were there for their health, others for the spectacles and amusements offered at that time of year, and still others because Vichy was the place where fashionable people should be seen during August.

Every day at the front doors there was a heavy movement of baggage as guests departed and others arrived. I noticed that French became more and more the spoken language about me. The foreigners were getting back to their various countries before frontiers were closed, and the new arrivals were the first refugees from the north of France and Paris.

Towards the end of the month young men became particularly scarce. The French had called a large portion of the army to the colors, and the order for general mobilization was expected hourly. A head waiter, of whom I was particularly fond, excused the slowness with which my luncheon arrived, and told me that three of the chefs and many of the kitchen help had received their orders that morning. At dinner he himself was missing. I asked the assistant head waiter for an explanation. "Telegram, sir. He's an Italian and had to hurry before it was too late to cross over. And I'm off tomorrow, Monsieur, to fight on the Italian border against my friend. Is it not tragic? Here we are working together happily one day, and soon I may have to kill him in self-defense. *Ah, mon Dieu! Quelle vie!*"

Whenever a bellboy came into the dining room I noticed that all the waiters turned towards him with a nervous, enquiring expression on their faces. Had he the small, unimposing slip of paper that meant so much to them, that would change their lives in an instant from the peaceful pursuit of serving out food to the dangerous and hard life of a soldier in war? They tried to take it calmly, winked at one another, and joked amongst themselves. Several received their papers during meal hours and immediately left the room, followed by an embarrassed silence on the part of the guests, and a momentary lack of service from fellow waiters. Then slowly conversation and service would be resumed. Hour by hour the hotel staff was being depleted, and old men had to be brought in to replace the young.

My cure was only half finished. I was taking the thing more out of curiosity than necessity, anyway, and decided to go back to Paris. Perhaps I could be of some use there, having served for almost two years in the last war, and feeling still young enough to do my part in this one. The road up was crowded with cars going in both directions, all bulging with baggage. Those going north were

returning to the capital to their homes and to learn what was happening there. Those going south were filled with people who felt that it was safer to be away from Paris.

Once there I found Paris calmer than I had expected. You had the feeling, more or less false, that you were at the source of information and knew what was going on. Restaurants, cafés and night clubs were unusually animated. Under such circumstances people like to be out, away from loneliness and surrounded by other people. Each day more and more uniforms were in evidence, and at the smart gathering-places officers' caps were in the majority where the cloak-room girls held sway. This did not last long, however, as all military men, with the exception of a few who were stationed in Paris, were dispatched to the front. Many shops closed, and those owners who decided to remain open plastered streamers of paper over their show windows to prevent them from breaking when the bombs began to fall. Few doubted that Paris would be bombed once the hostilities began. Housewives purchased rolls of blue paper and black materials to cover their windows and keep lights from showing at night. There was a shortage of candles and flash-



lights. Automobiles were ordered to run on their dimmers, causing many accidents, and street lamps were partly covered or put out altogether. The City of Light became a City of Darkness, and it was difficult to find one's way around after sunset. Police appeared wearing steel helmets, with gas masks swung over their shoulders. Those on night traffic duty were supplied with white capes and helmets, but not before a good number had been run down in the darkness. All islands were removed from the streets to avoid accidents. Laborers worked feverishly piling bags of sand around the most interesting and beautiful monuments for protection, and all the great museums were emptied of their treasures, which were either buried or carried to safer places. The stained-glass windows of Notre Dame, priceless and irreplaceable, were carefully removed. In a few short hours the face of glorious Paris was changed, and over it spread an expression of sadness to replace the one of beauty and gaiety.

One could not help noticing the difference. Never had I realized how great was my love for this city until it was menaced and in danger of being destroyed.

The order for general mobilization was received

calmly. So was the declaration of war. Too calmly for my taste. I had expected to see more enthusiasm, more of the old French martial spirit, with soldiers marching, bands playing and women cheering and waving flags and throwing flowers or at least kisses to the departing heroes. There was none of this. Even at the stations, from which troop trains were departing one after the other, there were only sad, tearful farewells. There were no military bands playing the "Marseillaise," no groups of soldiers gaily singing the "Madelon," so popular in the first World War, nothing to stir one's enthusiasm. It was an unpopular war, utterly lacking in glamor—a war without music. This seemed a very bad omen. I had always believed that a singing army is a winning army.

The problem of what I could do best to serve a cause which I felt was my own as well as France's was not so easy to solve. At the American Hospital in Neuilly there was nothing I could do. Perhaps later. Would I fill in an application? Yes. The American Legion, Paris Post, had called for volunteers, but when I went there they did not seem to know what they would do with the men when they got them. There was great confusion, and I

filled out another long application blank. Finally the Embassy accepted the use of my car, with me as chauffeur, for odd jobs. This was better than nothing. At least I did not feel so completely useless. I had tried to enlist in the French Army and found it closed to Americans on account of the Neutrality Act. The French were particularly anxious not to displease the United States Government at this point, and had even barred the Foreign Legion to us.

My job at the Embassy was that of a glorified errand boy, minus his salary. Sometimes it was interesting, sometimes dull. But I could feel the pulse of things, was closer to the heartbeats than if I had not been there, and I was doing something, though very little, to help. I drove deep into the country to fetch and bring to Paris aged American ladies who were stuck for lack of funds or transportation; I went to the Prefecture of Police to obtain passes, carried mail and people to Dinard, where the women and children of the Embassy had been sent in a special train. The trips to Dinard were not annoying, as some of the Embassy ladies were amusing. I am afraid we shocked the French by laughing too much.

The first American organization that seemed likely to accomplish anything was the Iroquois Ambulance Unit, and I joined that. It was headed by John de la Chesney, a man with charm and ten years' experience in the Foreign Legion, by Steele Powers, who later took out a section of ambulances for the American Legion organization, and Jack Hasey, whose feet were subsequently frozen while he was serving as ambulance driver in Finland. I was to be an honorary member of the committee and go out in command of the second section. A château at Ville d'Avray, near Paris, was lent us by Powers' mother and served as living quarters, while another friend placed his office in town at our disposal.

Volunteer drivers came to the office, were examined and in most cases enrolled. There was no paucity of men anxious to do their humble bit. But money was tight. We couldn't seem to get any. There was a war, yes, but no fighting, therefore no wounded. So why ambulances? The answer to that was hard to find. We continued undiscouraged, taking in men, practising night and day driving through the woods of the château, in and out of "shell" holes that we had dug ourselves, and look-

ing for money. The question of how to feed and warm the boys became more and more acute as winter approached. A few of us had a little money, though not nearly enough to heat the château and keep some thirty-odd appetites satisfied. Eddie, the Negro cook, did his best to make a little go a long way.

About this time both the American Field Service and the American Volunteer Ambulance outfit seemed actually to be making progress. We, on the other hand, were rich in men and still poor in money. While the Iroquois Unit, of which I am proud to have been one of the early members, supplied the core of the personnel for all American sections which saw service on the fronts in France and Finland, we did not have the price of two ambulances deposited with our treasurer. Therefore, with many regrets, we decided to break up and join forces with the more prosperous organizations. For personal reasons a few went to the Field Service, and the remainder to the A. V. A., which was connected with Paris Post of the American Legion.

These were calm months from the war angle. Communiqués from the front had "nothing to report" day after day. A few times the air raid sirens

were sounded, but one had the impression that these *alertes* were more for practice than because of any real danger. I was dragged by friends into a cellar that was supposed to be bomb-proof when the first alarm went off, and decided that it was better to be killed outright than be caught and buried alive in one of these rat traps. After that I stayed in bed, or went to the window and smoked, and listened for the sound of motors in the sky, which I rarely heard. When I was living at the Hôtel Crillon I would sometimes walk downstairs after the "all clear" signal was given and watch the people returning from the shelters, or admire the beauty of the Place de la Concorde, lighted by the moon or the rising sun. The sheer loveliness of Paris fascinated me.

Our work at the Field Service progressed slowly. The design for the ambulance bodies had been completed and we were delighted with the results we had obtained. The stretcher-carriers were particularly advantageous as they were simple and a man could work fast loading, even under shellfire and in the dark. French Army regulations called for another system, which we did not like at all. It was slow, cumbersome and almost impossible to

manipulate at night without lights. There was some difficulty "selling them" our idea, and it was only after considerable discussion that we were permitted to adopt it. The bodies were to be built in Paris, the chassis to come from America. When would they be shipped? was the question we were constantly asking ourselves. Also, French body-builders refused to go ahead with their work until they had the chassis, explaining that the bodies might not fit if made on blueprint specifications. No amount of arguing would change their minds, which meant another heartbreaking delay. However, there did not appear to be any great hurry as there were still practically no wounded.

Having nothing to do but wait I decided to go on an expedition to take color photographs in Corsica. I had been planning this before the war intervened. The necessary permission was not easy to obtain, Corsica being in the war zone, but I finally got it and set out.

Corsica was armed to the proverbial teeth. Every second male on the island was in uniform, and on all sides I saw signs of preparation for defense. Most of the soldiers were natives who had been mobilized on the spot. The French had wisely fig-

ured that they would best defend their own homeland in case of attack from the Italians, their hereditary enemies. Many of them assured me, without my even asking, that they would die rather than be separated from France, which they looked on as mother country. At Ajaccio the Prefect drew a line on my map from Solenzara across Zonza and Sartene to Propriano, and asked me not to photograph below this line. It was, he explained, being very heavily fortified and I might get into trouble. Otherwise, I could do pretty much as I pleased as long as I kept my lenses on unmilitary subjects.

I finished my series of pictures and returned to Paris, where I found that very little advance had been made in our work. Chassis for the first section were on Staten Island docks, but space on ships was scarce and given over mostly to weapons of destruction. However, here was some progress, and not long after a cable arrived announcing that the chassis were on the water.

This meant another two or three weeks of waiting before the body-builders could go to work; so I took a night train for Cannes. I wanted to see what life was like on the Riviera during a major war. To and from Corsica I had passed by way of



Marseilles. Tension between France and Italy had definitely lessened, and in Nice the lights along the Promenade des Anglais were lighted. These were the first I had seen for months. In place of foreigners on the coast there were a great many French people seeking refuge from the storm every one expected to break over the north, and life went on very much as before. Regulations and food restrictions were ignored. The war seemed too far away to be taken seriously, and there existed a surprising amount of indifference. The Maginot Line was the ruin of France. People sat back and grew soft and fat, believing foolishly that it was impregnable, that the Germans would never pass. In the south they hardly even discussed the war, so secure did they feel behind their famous fortifications. They were tired of the war, and now with the Italians quiet why worry? This attitude of the people, plus the lack of enthusiasm that I had noted in the army, made me distinctly uneasy. What could the French be thinking? Did they imagine for a moment that the Germans would hesitate to go *around* the Maginot Line, which did not reach to the English Channel, whenever they felt that the time was ripe? Did they think that the Germans would hesi-

tate to go *over* this famous line with their thousands of bombing planes? Some of us were fully aware that Pierre Cot had completely wrecked French aviation, and that since his removal as head of the Air Ministry there had not been time to build up a force that would come anywhere near matching the strength of the Germans. I tried to discuss these facts with people whom I considered intelligent, but they would have none of it. "The Maginot Line, the Maginot Line." They all had the same idea, and repeated it like parrots.

A telegram advised me that the chassis had arrived and I hastened back to Paris.

## CHAPTER III

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### WE'RE OFF

LIFE in Paris continued to become more and more normal, except for two things: a great many uniforms, as soldiers and officers came back on their first leaves, and midnight closing hours. One had become used to the black-out, and air raid signals were less and less frequent. Civilians no longer carried gas masks, and a great number of refugees returned to the capital daily. News from the front was of the "All Quiet" variety, and we began to wonder if the Germans really would dare to attack. Some said that the warring nations had created such terrific machines of destruction that they were afraid to use them.

About this time my old friend Ross Sanders came up from his home in the south. The wounds he had received at Verdun in 1916 were too severe to allow him to serve at the front, so he would work in the Paris office. He was a sculptor and a Bohe-

mian, and as I wanted to be with him I followed when he moved into the Hotel Odessa over on the Left Bank in the heart of Montparnasse. Stehlin and Weeks also came along, as did Jack Brant when he arrived from New York. It was a ribald little place, and we enjoyed it thoroughly. The old girl who ran it put us on the fourth floor, walk-up. The fourth and fifth floors, she explained, were reserved for steady guests. The other three floors, and this she did not explain, were reserved for the pleasure of unmarried couples who joyously came, spent from one to twenty-four hours, and left—no questions asked, cleanliness and discretion guaranteed.

The fourth floor was particularly intriguing, and often on the noisy side after midnight, the hour when military law closed the doors of cabarets and hospitality houses. Several of the “steady guests” on our floor worked in these. There was a pretty artists’ model, whose meager earnings were supplemented from time to time by gentlemen visitors. And there was the cabaret singer, who also did not earn quite enough with her voice. The only one of this trio who seemed to have plenty of money and always slept alone was Lucille, a vivacious

blonde from the Sphinx across the way. She was our most interesting study and most intimate companion, and I think we were all extremely fond of her. I know I was. And we respected her absolutely. Often she came home at night a little the worse for drink. This was part of her business. She had to drink with the clients, just as she had to go upstairs with them if they wanted her. But outside of "business hours," which were from 2 P.M. until midnight, she conducted herself most properly. She refused to mix business with pleasure. When she was with us, having a final nightcap, it was pleasure, which meant talking of the war, of her travels in Italy, of politics, and keeping the skirt of her well-cut suit below her knees. She was so well behaved with us that it was easy to tell she was not a lady. At the Sphinx she would come and chat with us, frank and unabashed in her nudity. That was business, and she made a good living at it. She was one of the best girls and had been there for six years. The people who ran the place were kind to her. Men were easy to handle if you knew how, she told us, and one really had very little trouble. I am sure that Lucille was happy. She cried when we left.

On the first of April we moved out to United States House at the Cité Universitaire. This was to be our new headquarters, and while it was less amusing than the Odessa, it was a more dignified address. Two days later twenty-three of our volunteer drivers arrived, via Genoa, from America, and my work began in earnest. I was placed in charge of personnel, and later made leader of Section One. Donald Coster was named as second in command.

Our quarters were very comfortable. Each man had a room to himself, and there were showers with hot and cold running water. Also there was a library with an open fire. Here were installed banners of the old sections which served in World War Number One. They were stained with age and covered with decorations. Downstairs was the large refectory where we ate excellent food at a T-shaped table, the head of which was reserved for officers and guests. The building was new, and had been constructed for the use of American students in Paris. Now peace had given way to war, and students were replaced by ambulance drivers.

Despite these bodily comforts the men were nervous and impatient. They had not enlisted to see

Paris, but to go to the front and do their part. They wanted action. When would the cars be ready? When would they go to the front? Those were the questions most often asked. Soon now, we said. The ambulances were fast taking shape, and a ceremony had been planned for the twenty-first of May. It was to be an impressive affair, befitting the importance of dedicating the first section of an organization that had done so much for France in the last war. The Court of Honor in the Invalides had been designated as the holding place, and many high authorities, both from civil and military life, would be there. After that we would go out.

This news encouraged the men, and they went about their more prosaic jobs in higher spirits. First, there were uniforms to be made. This was done by the same tailors who had outfitted the American Field Service between 1914 and 1917, and who also claimed the distinction of having made General Pershing's uniforms when he was in France. Then there were three trips for each man to the American Hospital at Neuilly, where inoculations were given against typhoid, paratyphoid, diphtheria and tetanus, and vaccination against smallpox. There were steel helmets, gas masks, and other reg-

ulation equipment to be requisitioned at the army supply depots. There was orderly duty, both in the dining-hall and at the front desk. Le Clair Smith, wounded in action while serving with the 5th Marines in the last war, ably took charge of this. And there were a hundred other things to do. For recreation there was always Paris, or card games in the library. Still, there was a strong undercurrent of restlessness.

At last we were assigned a French lieutenant, who was to act as liaison officer, a sergeant-major, a corporal, a mechanic, and a cook. This was a cheering sign, and a mild form of drill was added to our other activities. The men were good at this, showing a willingness to serve and a desire to learn.

The cars began to be completed two or three at a time, and all signs of restlessness disappeared. The Section was getting nearer and nearer the front. The personnel was complete, and now the ambulances were coming in. As they were turned out by the body-builders we brought them to the Cité and parked them behind United States House. They were long, gray, sleek-looking cars, with AMERICAN FIELD SERVICE painted across their sides, and we were proud of them. The



stretcher arrangements inside were most satisfactory, and we had won our point over the regulation French Army ambulance equipment by demonstrating that we could load and unload exactly three times faster than they could.

Every morning we practised loading and unloading "wounded," using drivers on the stretchers, and others to do the work. A car would dash up to a point designated as a first aid station where the "wounded" lay on stretchers, load up, swing down the road and back, to unload at the same spot, which had now become the field hospital. It was interesting work, and proved most useful when, not long after, we were thrown without preliminaries into the midst of war's flaming hell.

Then Germany attacked Holland and Belgium, and things moved fast. Section One was ready, the last man in uniform and equipped, the last of the twenty ambulances out behind United States House, stretchers and blankets for the wounded in their place. My staff car, gray and waiting to go, was there, and the two repair trucks, as well as the kitchen trailer. Everything had been checked and double-checked down to the minutest detail. It was, as far as humanly possible, a perfect outfit.

The ceremony at the Invalides was called off. There was no time now for that sort of thing, and our departure was set for seven-thirty on the morning of May 18. We would stop for a moment of silence at the tomb of France's unknown soldier, and that was all. From there we would proceed to the front.

These were feverish days, and the air of Paris was charged with electricity. The war had started at last. No more of this lingering on, this eternal waiting for something to happen. It was happening, and in a big way. The general feeling was one of relief. The boil that had festered so long and so painfully had at last burst. Hourly, uniforms became less and less frequent in the streets as soldiers and officers were called back to their regiments. All leaves were cancelled. There was real fighting, French, English, and Belgians side by side against the Hun.

Nearly every night now the air-raid sirens shrieked their dismal warning that German planes were coming over the city. They did not bomb at that time, but came for observation, or to break the nerves of the population. However, one could never be sure, and as a precaution I had the men

dress at each alarm and deploy the cars, so that one bomb would not destroy several at a time. Also, this was good exercise and taught them to drive without lights. We would stand by until the "all clear" signal just in case something really happened, when we would be needed to help pick up wounded in the streets. Often we went on the roof and watched the magnificent display of searchlights and anti-aircraft fire. It was better and far more impressive than any fireworks. But none of the enemy planes was seen falling in flames. There was, however, danger from the heavy pieces of steel which dropped back to earth, whistling viciously, from the bursting shells, and I asked the men to give up their vantage point on the roof. It would have been a shame to have one or more casualties from French guns even before leaving Paris.

A large party was planned for the night preceding our departure. The idea was more pleasant than practical, for when we arose at five the next morning there were aching heads and many a dusty tasting tongue. Nevertheless, the evening was definitely a success, and a demonstration of Franco-American friendship that none of those present

will ever forget. Lovering Hill, the hard-working head of our Paris office, made a beautiful speech, full of eloquence and deep with feeling. Amusing Maurice Barber went serious on us and vivaed everybody except the Germans, and even Jack Brant's speech was on the serious side. Colonel Mallet, who had been closely connected with the Field Service in the first World War, wept as he thanked us in behalf of the French nation, and I had, to me most embarrassing, the job of answering him. After that we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves until much too late into the night.

There was then no thought of defeat in the minds of Parisians. The only question was, how long will it take to break the Hitler organization? But there was always that lack of music that weighed on my mind and shocked me profoundly. Why was there no glamor to this war, no playing of martial music, no singing columns of soldiers marching off to glorious battle and victory? The great "Madelon" had been forgotten, and no song written to replace it. At some cabarets song plugging artists tried to put across the French version of—"We'll hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line, if the Siegfried Line's still there"—but the

public response when it was supposed to be sung in unison was distinctly half-hearted. The enthusiasm simply was not there. The French people did not wish to "Die for Danzig," and they were even now convinced that their country was safe behind its Maginot fortifications. I cursed these fortifications, and yet I believe that I was as hypnotized by their strength as any Frenchman, in spite of the fact that I wished to be skeptical. It was impossible for me to vision the German Army spreading over my beautiful France as conquerors, impossible and revolting. Some miracle would happen. God would not allow it. He must not.

Headaches or no headaches, every man of Section One had his car lined up in numerical order in front of our quarters, and stood by ready to start, promptly at seven-fifteen on the morning of May 18. Alex Weeks had tuned up the motors and they purred silently, ready like the men to take the highroad to adventure, the difficult and uncertain road to war, where danger and hardships and even death lurked at every corner, at every turning. I have never been able to understand why men will voluntarily leave peace and quiet for the maelstrom of battle. I am always wondering why

men do this, and I include myself. I fear that I shall never understand.

We rolled silently along the deserted streets of Paris, a long gray column in the dull gray light of morning. The few people who were abroad at that hour gave us a second glance, and stopped to watch us pass. Here was something new to these people who had seen so much—Americans going towards the front. Several waved tired hands at us by way of encouragement, and shouted, "Vive l'Amérique!" We in turn waved back, happy to be recognized, and answered, "Vive la France!" We felt very happy to think that at last it was going to be our privilege to serve what many of us considered the mother of civilized living and liberty—La France.

The convoy moved rapidly from the Cité to the Porte d'Orléans, across the Seine, unforgettably beautiful in the translucent half-light and mist, and up the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe. We were punctual to the second, but our Paris staff, a few French officers and our friends were there waiting. Josette was there. We saw each other and waved. I swallowed hard and blinked to keep

my emotion to myself. This was no time to show one's true feelings.

Brief commands under the huge arch where the eternal flame flickered, a moment's silence, men at attention and officers saluting, in honor of France's glorious dead, hurried farewells, and we were off.

Around the Étoile, down Avenue Wagram, to the right on Boulevard Berthier, and to the left on a road where the signpost read BEAUVAIS—60 KILOMETRES.

## CHAPTER IV

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### THE FRONT AT LAST

IT WAS hard to realize that over this beautiful road, lined much of the distance on either side by blossoming apple trees, we were moving on our way to war. The sky was the soft blue sky of a May day, and as far as the eye could reach peasants, those honest, thrifty tillers of France's rich soil, worked in the fields. One could not believe that only a few miles away from such bucolic scenes men were fighting terrific and destructive battles. The peasants seemed to demand but little from life, only the right to work in peace, and now for the second time in a quarter of a century the German hordes were sweeping over their land.

Car Number 2 dropped out and I stopped to see what was wrong. Nothing serious. A slight adjustment of the carburetor by the French mechanic and I led it back hell-bent towards its place in the convoy. Clinton Curtis was at the wheel of the staff



car and I was watching behind when I saw the driver suddenly lose control. A fearful moment passed as the ambulance swung from one side of the road to the other, turned completely around and over on its side. The three cars that we had passed stopped short, and the rest of the convoy, not knowing what had happened, continued. As I ran back the driver and his aid climbed out through the door, badly shaken but apparently not seriously injured. Folds was moaning slightly, and I asked him where he was hurt. "It isn't me," he said. "I'm just thinking what's happened to the four bottles of fine old brandy I stored in the back of the car." A hasty examination reassured him that they were intact, and he smiled again. Peter Moore was especially concerned about the car. It looked pretty well smashed up, and he felt that it was his fault. As a matter of fact I should have taken the blame if any one, for setting too fast a pace. But I liked a well-ordered convoy, with every car in its numerical place. Had I let him come along, after he dropped out, behind the other cars there would have been no accident. However, when I later had occasion to observe the German Army at first-hand I noted that they also were careful about such

details, and I believe that the greatness of their organization as a whole is largely due to this attention to small things.

Moore's hand was bleeding quite a lot and I sent him along to Beauvais in the staff car to have it bandaged at a military hospital.

Soon Alex Weeks, our American mechanic, came rumbling up in the heavy repair truck, towing the trailer kitchen. He could get the ambulance up, he said, and it would run. The chassis was all right. Only the body was damaged, and he thought he might be able to fix that. Stout fellow! He placed two extra tires on the road where the up-turned wheels would drop to break the shock, fastened a tow-cable between the upper side of the ambulance and the rear of the light repair truck, gave a mighty jerk with the truck, and the ambulance rolled over like a great, clumsy animal and dropped on its four wheels. The ignition key was broken off short in the lock, but this was child's play to Weeks. He detached a wire here, hooked it up there, and the motor ran. Hutchinson drove it for at least another week, when we had need of every car, and then I sent it back to Paris

to have the body repaired as it was slowly shaking to pieces.

Although the civilian population had not been evacuated from Beauvais we began to see signs of the war in earnest. It is an important little town in that many highroads meet there, and over these roads from the north and northeast came thousands upon thousands of refugees and soldiers retreating from the Ardennes and Flanders. The streets were cluttered with dust-covered, unshaven soldiers in trucks, on gun carriages, on foot. There seemed to be no order, no one to tell them where to go or what to do. Never have I seen such tired-looking soldiers, and in their eyes one could see the dull expression of men who are so fatigued that they are past caring, of men who have looked death in the face for days and nights, yet have somehow come through alive. They were silent, not so much as speaking to one another. What could they say? They had nothing to talk about but death and defeat. The Germans had already broken through. Those who were walking dragged one foot painfully behind the other, advancing ever so slowly like dazed creatures. They were hardly human. I

doubt if they were even thinking, or if they could think. The sight was not a heartening one, and for the first time I began to feel an awful doubt. Was the German army so strong that it could actually conquer France?

The military authorities billeted Section One in a large house, set back from the road in a wild and not unattractive garden. Our first difficulty was to get the kitchen through the gate. There was an iron arch and the kitchen would not pass under it; so it had to be removed. Weeks handled this much as he had handled the upset ambulance. A cable strung between the arch and the rear end of the repair truck, a jerk, and that was all. We felt rather badly destroying property like this, yet our consciences need not have troubled us. A few days after we left the place was levelled by German bombs.

The house was completely empty. However, the men showed themselves to be good soldiers from the start. One detail rustled up some boards and made tables for eating and benches to sit on. Another group brought in a load of straw-filled mattresses, and soon we were comfortably installed. From windows on the top floor we could watch

the comings and goings of a fighting patrol of American-built planes, and I saw one come over the field where they landed and do a double "victory roll" which meant that he had shot down two of the enemy. That gave us a great kick and we cheered him.

After we got the house in order there did not seem to be much work to do that first afternoon, and some of us went out to the road that ran down past the western side of the property to watch the refugees go by. It was a never-ending chain of helpless, hopeless misery. It was a sight that one could never forget. That humanity could be made to suffer so in our modern times is beyond belief. They had left all their worldly possessions, these poor people, except what they could carry with them. They had left homes that they would probably never see again, prosperous farms to go to ruin or be destroyed by the horrors of war; everything that they loved and had worked throughout their lifetimes to build up was now being torn down by a ruthless invader. Simple folk, they could not understand.

Some rode in automobiles, mostly broken-down affairs that certainly would not carry them far,

others in farm wagons of various sizes drawn by beautifully cared-for Percherons, the powerful farm horses of northern France and Belgium. Often one saw four generations of the same family in one wagon, and in the larger carts there would sometimes be more than twenty people. The big horses clop-clopped slowly by, and uncomprehending expressions covered the faces of the people. They all seemed to be mutely asking the same question, Why? The poorer ones, who possessed neither automobiles nor horses and wagons, went by on bicycles, in push-carts, on foot. Mothers pushed babies in baby carriages or on handle bars. Old men dragged doggedly at the shafts of carts in which sat old women, their wrinkled, weather-tanned faces pictures of complete bewilderment. Children cried or laughed or were silent. Some realized that tragedy was stalking them, while others thought that the whole thing was a sort of huge picnic. These were the ones who had not yet been bombed or machine-gunned from the air. Once they experienced that, they knew the never-ending caravan was not bent on pleasure.

Military police watched the refugees closely. They were on the lookout for spies and fifth col-

umnists coming through in disguise. Once the officer in charge asked me abruptly if I was armed. I said I was not. "Look out, then," he said. "Here comes a suspicious character." He signalled to one of his men and they started up the road.

I must admit the nun did look like a man, and rather like a German. They drew their pistols and stopped her, and I moved closer to see and hear what was happening. She was very calm and showed her papers without a protest. They were in order, but the officer was taking no chances. He made an almost imperceptible movement, touching her breasts, then apologized. The nun smiled. "I understand, Captain. I also am French, and we cannot be too careful."

When the military police had gone off in another direction a woman, very nervous and excited, rushed up to me and reported that two suspicious-looking characters who did not speak French had just passed, heading north. Would I go and find out about them? They had just turned the corner. I carefully pointed out that the Germans were far too intelligent to send suspicious-looking men who did not speak French as fifth columnists, but as she insisted I followed her. Naturally they had dis-

appeared in the crowd. This was the strained atmosphere in which we found ourselves at Beauvais. There was an unbelievable terror, a fixed idea that spies were everywhere. The war of nerves was going against the French.

All night long we could hear the refugee carts rumbling by, and the movement of military trucks, artillery and tanks. The sweet spring air seemed charged with a certain ominous feeling which kept me from sleeping, and I was glad when day broke. Even the birds did not sing as they should at this season of the year, and the odor of flowers was not pleasant. The world was all wrong, and there was nothing that could be done to put it right.

An orderly came from the hospital next door and asked if we could lend a hand with the wounded. Their own stretcher-bearers were dead tired. This was not our job, but the men jumped at the opportunity to serve. They must do something besides watching the refugees file past, and listening for the birds that failed to sing.

The hospital was filled with wounded, mostly soldiers, but also many civilians. It was the first direct contact for most of the men with this sort of thing, this horrible suffering, the odor of fresh



blood, to say nothing of the sight of it, and the drugs and bandages and stained stretchers. They took it well, without so much as a shudder, and worked until the sweat stood out on their faces and soaked their clothes. I do not know how they felt inside. Personally I had gotten soft since the last war, and I am free to admit that I suffered both mentally and physically, a certain nausea taking hold of me. Definitely I must harden myself against any weakness. It was my job to set an example.

One of the nurses asked me to speak to an English lieutenant whose French was rather limited. He was a strapping young fellow, and had lost his right arm at the shoulder when the troop train in which he was going to the front had been bombed near Amiens. Even though he must have been suffering extreme pain he did not forget good breeding. "Will you have a seat, sir?" I thanked him and sat down by the bed. He did not seem to mind the arm so much. He neither looked at it nor mentioned it. What was particularly worrying him was the loss of his shaving kit, toothbrush, and a photo of his wife. This is what he had been trying to tell the nurse who had fetched me. The last he had seen of his kit was before the train was

bombed. Would I try and locate it? This was an impossible feat, but I said I'd do my best. From the gray coloring that was even now coming into his boyish face I knew that he would not live long enough to hold me to my promise. Even while I talked to him I could see the signs of death approaching. The nurse whispered into my ear that he also had a stomach wound. As I did not wish to tire him I excused myself. "Will you drop back for tea, sir?" he surprised me by saying. An English gentleman to the very end. I did go back, and found his face covered over with a sheet. There was no use looking for the shaving kit, toothbrush and photograph of his wife now, even if I had the least chance of finding them. I stood for a moment gazing at the inanimate form beneath the sheet, and asked myself why. Why was this handsome fellow, scarcely more than a lad, dragged from his country and the wife he obviously loved, to be mangled and killed in a foreign land? I shook my head and went away. It did not make sense.

After that I drove down to the railway station to watch the loading of a Red Cross train. It was especially constructed, with long rows of stretcher racks, three deep and separated by aisles where the

doctors and attendants could pass. Everywhere there were wounded, some groaning feebly, though for the most part they suffered in silence, their big eyes either staring straight before them or watching us move about. There were men without arms, without legs, and one I remember with the right arm and the left leg gone. His haunting eyes never left me. I do not know what he thought I was and why he watched me, but I do know that I shall never forget the expression in those great black eyes.

I noticed a young woman, dishevelled and rather lovely, sobbing bitterly over a little boy who had lost his foot. She was trying to comfort him, and he was looking up at her with an almost placid expression on his pale face, as though he would like to comfort her. When she noticed that I was watching she straightened up and came over to me. "Oh, please, Mister Officer," she sobbed. "Please have some one else talk to the little boy. He is so young and sweet, and so badly wounded. I cannot stand it any longer. He is not my child." For a long moment she could not control her voice. Then she said, "My little Claudette was killed by bombs on the road this morning."

It was indeed with a very heavy heart that I left the station to return to our headquarters, and I began to fear that I would not become hardened as easily as I wished. "My God! My God!" I said to myself. "How can any one on earth cause so much suffering? Is anything in this world worth such a price?"

Back at the house I found that Colonel Soulier, under whose direct command we were, had just sent a message asking me to report at his office. I hastened to obey. The orders were as follows: Four cars would go to Montdidier to evacuate a hospital, two would remain at Beauvais for liaison, and the rest of the Section would report immediately at Cempuis for duty. The six cars would join the main unit on the following day. Here was action at last. Well, we had asked for it, and although my drivers were dead tired from their day-long labors as stretcher-bearers they welcomed these new instructions to break camp and move forward. We had slept one night in the house.

I asked the French lieutenant to take the four cars to Montdidier. Coster would remain at Beauvais with George King and Gregory Wait, while

I would take the main part of the Section on to Cempuis.

Backs were tired and hands blistered from carrying stretchers, but it was not long before everything was packed and we were once again on the road. The men did everything with a speed and willingness which proved that they had above all one wish—to serve well.

It was not difficult to find Cempuis, although it was off the main road, and I brought my convoy of fourteen ambulances, two trucks, kitchen and staff car to a stop in the quiet little village at about twenty minutes before midnight. Luckily we had a full moon, which made driving without lights relatively easy. Also we had carefully covered over or disconnected the tail lights that come on when brakes are used. A long line of these when the convoy slowed down or stopped would have made too good a target for enemy planes.

An orderly helped us find our way up through a very narrow lane to a place where field and woods met. This was ideal. The cars could be well hidden under the trees, and the field was there for turning, or sleeping for those who preferred

the moon and stars to the closer quarters inside their ambulances.

I walked about the field listening to the night sounds, breathing in the good air, noting carefully that no lights were allowed to show, and thinking. Night before last we had slept in Paris. How terribly remote and far away all that seemed, and how little we had realized what was really happening away from the great city. Even now most of the people there knew nothing of the terrible refugee problem, or of the many wounded and killed. They knew that a battle was raging, but surely they could not picture the horrors of all I had seen during that long, long day. I wondered what Josette would think if she had seen, and I imagined her walking through the hospitals and on the station platform at Beauvais. There is no doubt that she would have accepted it bravely and with the courage of which I knew her capable. She too seemed far away, and yet I wanted her presence near me. I needed her there in Cempuis to impart to me some of her courage. In my mind I pictured her, smiling through her tears, waving good-bye as we drew away from the Arc de Triomphe only yesterday morning. Time had no more mean-

ing. Nor did distance. Only space seemed real, and I looked up at the stars and moon. They were there, separated by great space, and all the rest was unreal, dreams, some bad, some good.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Watch that light." A voice answered in French and I could see the shadow of a soldier coming quickly towards me. He had covered his flashlight, or put it out. The moon was bright and he could see me plainly.

He was out of breath from running up the hill. "Colonel Soulier—calling from—Beauvais, sir."

The phone was some distance away and I followed the orderly (it was the same fellow who had kindly helped us locate the field), on the double.

The now familiar voice, soft, kind and tired, of my commanding officer came to me over the phone. "Lieutenant Muir?" "*Oui, mon Colonel.*" "You are to take your full convoy, proceed to Amiens and bring as many wounded as you can from Hospital No. 3 back here. The greatest haste is necessary. Can you go at once?" "*Oui, mon Colonel.* At once." Coster was in the Colonel's office and spoke to me. He was taking his two cars to Amiens. There had been terrific bombings. The town was

in flames. The Germans were coming in. Perhaps we would meet there. Good-by. Good luck. I never heard his voice again in France.

I ran back to the Section and blew short sharp blasts on my whistle, the order to assemble. Out of the cars the men tumbled, rubbing sleep from their eyes, and in from the field. "We're moving," I said. "Immediately." Some one asked where to, and I answered Amiens. That was all. Silently and with efficient haste they put their cars in order, started the motors and formed the convoy. Where in the hell were Smitty and Easton? They were not in their car, and not in the field. A search party quickly found them peacefully sleeping in a nearby barn, and before they realized what was happening they were driving down the narrow lane. It had taken fifteen minutes from the time I blew my whistle until now when we were back in the village ready to start.

Silently we had arrived in Cempuis, and silently we left it, on our way to Amiens.



## CHAPTER V

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### IN BLAZING AMIENS

THE long day just past had been a Sunday. I do not know why I thought of this as I watched the ambulances, shining gray in the bright light of the moon, swing one by one around a curve behind us. One day was very much like another whether it was the third, fifth, or seventh in the week. Perhaps that is why this particular date impressed itself so strongly on my mind. There had been no pealing church bells, no toilers taking their day of rest and peace and quiet in Beauvais. A Sunday so unlike any other Sunday I had ever known in France. Even during World War One, the Sabbath was strictly observed a few miles behind the fighting lines. Now one was always in the shadow of bombing planes, and we had been warned eight times by the alarm sirens that German fliers were in the vicinity.

We seemed to be the only living beings moving

north towards Amiens. On the other side of the road the silent, terror-stricken parade of refugees marched by in the opposite direction. They were mostly on foot now. The luckier ones, with automobiles and horse-drawn conveyances had gone ahead. Fathers pushed carts, piled high with what belongings they had hastily saved before the arrival of the Hun. Mothers carried babies in their arms or on their backs. Others carried heavy bundles containing all they possessed to begin life anew when the enemy had passed, or in some other part of France. And some just walked along empty-handed, as completely dazed as the soldiers from the Ardennes. I watched these piteous folk, fleeing before the ruthless invader, and gritted my teeth. One thing was certain in my mind. It came to me on that winding, refugee-crowded road to Amiens. *The Germans could not win.* They might enjoy the fruits of temporary or even lasting victory, but before God, if there be a God, they would one day have to answer for this crime, and in the eyes of men they would be a hated nation *forever*.

This thought eased my mind a little, and I turned my eyes ahead and began to give my full attention to the business of leading the convoy to Amiens

at as fast a pace as I deemed safe. We were following the shortest route over small country roads. Had the moon not been shining bright I would have gone by the much longer but easier national highway.

In ghostlike silence the convoy rolled through the beautiful countryside of Picardy, one car after the other at perfectly spaced intervals of about six yards. I watched it twisting and turning along the road behind the staff car, and it resembled a long gray snake gliding swiftly through the night, the moon shining down on its glistening, scaly back.

This was their first night convoy, and they had not been forty-eight hours out of Paris, yet every man drove like a veteran. They did everything like that. Their motto seemed to be: "To serve, and to serve well." I had never thought it possible to assemble such a fine crowd of fellows. They made the work of Section Leader a pleasure, and I was proud of them all.

For some distance the dust was terrible and made driving most difficult. All that the drivers could see were the white spots, painted expressly for night driving, on the rear ends of the cars ahead,

but they swallowed the dust, blinked it out of their eyes, and held their distance. In spite of all this we were rolling fast and making good time. Something in Colonel Soulier's voice had told me that there was not a moment to lose. On thinking back now I know that this was one of the greatest convoys I ever led, probably the greatest.

The two boys who had had the accident on the first day were with us. They insisted that their place was with the Section, and had refused to go back to Paris for medical treatment. Peter Moore was running a high fever from a shot of anti-tetanus the doctor had given him in Beauvais without asking whether or not he had already been inoculated. George Folds was sleeping in the back of the staff car with two fractured ribs. However, he had uttered no complaint since learning that his fine old brandy had come through intact. The sick car, ably handled by Hutchinson, rattled along in its place at No. 2.

On we rolled, and on and on, into the night, with the stream of refugees and retreating soldiers passing endlessly in the opposite direction. Eerie is perhaps the best adjective to describe this silent, ever-moving scene in life's most tragic drama.

Slowly, as we advanced, a dull red glow appeared in the sky to the north. It was not the right direction for the sun to rise, and anyway my watch showed only two-thirty, daylight saving time. I located the next village we came to on my map, using a flashlight which I had covered with dark blue paper so that it could not be seen from ten feet away. To the north was Amiens! The glow must be that city—proud possessor of one of the world's most beautiful cathedrals—in flames. And that was our objective!

The glow became brighter and brighter as we advanced, until great columns of black smoke could be seen rising and billowing out against the sky. And in these clouds were reflected flames from the burning town below, making a scene at once magnificent and terrible, a scene which Dante in his most imaginative moments could scarcely have surpassed.

I halted the convoy for a final check on top of a hill overlooking Amiens. In 1918 I had watched the bombardment by German cannon of this same town from the very spot on which we now stood. It seemed incredible. What a different matter this war was from the last. In fact, as I stood there in

the night watching the flaming city and turning back the pages of years to 1914-18, I thought of the old war as a romantic war. At the time it had seemed highly mechanized, but now. . . . Amateurish was the word that came to my mind. I remembered the cannon hammering away for days and weeks on end without doing the damage that a single passage of fifty bombing planes could do in thirty seconds today. The Germans had certainly used their so-called advanced civilization to perfect themselves in the art of dealing out death and destruction, unhappiness and misery. What, I asked myself, could they hope to gain by this mass creation of unhappiness and misery, by this wholesale sowing of death and destruction? Surely they must realize that it would come back on them some day; they must know the parable about reaping what you sow.

The convoy was intact. Even Alex Weeks, driving the heavy truck with the kitchen-trailer in tow, was there. But could I lead the men into this burning hell? The question flashed through my mind and was quickly answered. The Colonel's orders. I had answered, "*Oui, mon Colonel.*" And there were the wounded.

To our rear and in the direction from which we had just come another great flame went up and lighted the sky even more brightly. It was almost like broad day on the road now, although we would not see the rising sun for several hours more. There were no planes in the sky, so this latest fire must have been set off locally, probably by a fifth columnist. It was surely an oil reservoir, I thought, as the flames continued to mount and the fire to blaze more fiercely. A gunpowder depot would have gone up with one great burst and a terrific explosion, and an ammunition dump would have continued to explode for hours as the heat set off the shells.

One thing was certain: we could waste no time in Amiens. We must find the hospital as quickly as possible, load the wounded, and clear out. I had a hunch that the German fliers would be back at dawn. Undoubtedly most of the wounded would be stretcher cases. Those able to sit up could be evacuated in trucks. I ordered that the racks be lowered and everything put in readiness so that the loading could be done in a hurry and without delay.

All set! As I walked quickly towards my staff

car at the head of the convoy, looking into each ambulance to see that the racks were properly placed, the men gave me the impression of outward calm. If they felt any inward fear they did not show it. Weeks later, however, a driver confessed that he had hated me but once: at that moment when I stepped onto the running board of my car and blew one long and one short blast on my whistle—the order to advance.

I led the convoy at top speed towards flaming Amiens. We were back on the main highway and it was as brightly lighted as Broadway at Times Square. Nearing the outskirts we were forced to go more slowly because bombs had torn down many telephone and telegraph wires, and they lay in tangled masses across the street. Often we had to stop and clear them away, and they made queer, tinkling sounds as wheels ran over them. Once or twice they became caught in the wheels or under the cars, and it was a tough job to get them out. Then, too, we never knew when they were alive.

All this slowed us up more than I liked, and I kept my ears open for the sound of airplane motors. Also I watched anxiously above the glow of hundreds of fires for signs of sunrise, when I was sure



the Boches would return with their hellish bombs.

The further we penetrated into the town the worse the debris and tangled wires and flames became, but there was nothing to do except go ahead and hope to find the hospital. There was not a human being in the streets to direct us, and soon I found that it was possible to follow only the one street over which we were rolling. Every side street, to right and left, was blocked by burning houses and debris. Finally we came to a point that seemed at first glance to end our hopes of getting through at all. On either side of the street high buildings blazed furiously. Ominous crackling, as the flames ate away everything which was inflammable, broke the stillness of the night, and I halted the convoy. The interiors of the buildings were like blast furnaces, and only the shells stood, silhouetted grotesquely against the roaring inferno within. Would the walls stand up until we passed through? That could not be answered. We would have to try.

I ran the gauntlet in my staff car, with Clinton Curtis smoking calmly at the wheel, to see if the way was clear on the other side. There was no use getting the whole convoy caught in a pocket if

it were not. My car could turn quickly and possibly get back if the walls fell, but fourteen ambulances and two trucks were not so easily handled. The street beyond was clear. It was a nasty moment for me. We *had* to go ahead and get the wounded out, yet if the walls crumbled a second too soon I might lose half of my Section. The risk was terrific. Already the walls seemed to be tottering—or was this only my imagination?

Curtis drove back to the Section. I do not believe the fellow had a nerve in his body. He turned, and I piped the order on my whistle to follow me through. God! What a moment! "One, two, three, four, five, six. . . ." I counted them as they got into the safety zone beyond the fires. A few short moments after Weeks, bringing up the rear in his truck and trailer-kitchen, had thundered past, one of the walls fell, burying the street completely under several feet of molten ashes.

I think I had been praying. I really do not remember. Now we were blocked from behind. Probably the idea of turning back never crossed any of our minds, and if it had it was too late now.

On we drove, through unknown streets lighted only by flames. Amiens is a large town, spread out

over a good-sized area, and I was beginning to despair of finding the hospital before daylight, if at all, when a French ambulance came tearing in our direction. It stopped beside my car, which was in the lead, and a Red Cross nurse jumped out from beside the driver.

"Hurry," she said. "Follow us. They are waiting for you to evacuate the hospital, and there is just time. The Germans have taken the lower half of the town." Before completing this last phrase she had jumped back into her car, the driver had turned, and we found ourselves following this marvellous woman who had almost surely saved us all from being captured. Nor had she seemed unduly excited. Only efficient and to the point.

There were a great many wounded at the hospital, some even lying on the ground outside in the main courtyard. We could, I saw at a glance, never carry them all in one load, and we would never get back for a second before the Germans took the whole town. Perhaps even now we would not get out before they arrived.

The loading went too slowly for my taste, and I tried to hurry it up. The French stretcher-bearers were in a daze, knowing that they would

probably be taken prisoners in a few hours, and our fellows lent a hand. I told the Frenchmen that they might get out in time if they worked fast, but they were resigned to their fate and it was impossible to encourage them. Their morale seemed completely broken.

When the wounded understood that we were not going to be able to carry them all there were heartbreaking scenes. They were afraid to stay in Amiens, where they had witnessed such horrors, and the idea of escape from there was uppermost in their minds. Women and children whimpered and begged us to take them, and men protested that they had wives and families to which they must return. We took our orders from the military doctor in command and carried the cases he indicated as being the worst. Orders are orders for a soldier even under such distressing circumstances. I guess I was getting hard more rapidly than I had expected, and heaven knows that this was necessary.

During the time that the cars were being loaded I took a moment to look down over the city, which was dominated by the hospital. The conflagration was spreading fast, aided by a fairly strong breeze, and it was my impression that Amiens would soon

be nothing but a vast, charred ruin. There was no one to fight the flames. In fact, there appeared to be no one even to fight the advancing Germans. I strained my ears for the sound of shooting, and could hear nothing except the crackling of the near-by fires. The great cathedral, stark and black, stood out towering above it all like some mighty giant. It did not seem to have been touched or damaged, and was not burning. Was this the answer? Would it be Christianity and the Church that would in the long run win out against war and a barbarous people? I wondered.

A soldier touched me on my arm, breaking my trend of thought, and asked me to come to the commanding officer's bureau. I found him bent over a table writing a note by candlelight. As I entered he looked up. "A word for Colonel Soulier," he said, and went on writing. He seemed very old in that flickering, dim light, his gray hair ruffled and his face drawn with care and sorrow, as he wrote what might easily be his last words with a pencil on a dirty sheet of paper, and I felt strongly attracted to him all of a sudden when I realized that if he had not meant to stick to his post he would not be writing that note. His place was there

as long as there were French wounded to be cared for, and I have always loved courage. He had not reached the end of the note when a puff of wind through a broken window blew out the candle, and he finished it in the dark before I could find a match. When I relit the candle he was folding the paper. "There," he said, looking up at me with a wan smile. "Will you give that to the Colonel with my respects?" He shook my hand and returned my salute. "*Adieu.*"

Dawn was breaking and the air-raid sirens were sounding dismally as the convoy moved off with its full load of mangled humanity, both soldiers and civilians. The Boches were coming over to bomb that part of the town which they had not yet occupied, showing what perfect co-ordination there was between the advanced troops and the aviation. Some one rushed out from the hospital and tried to stop us, shouting that we should put the wounded back in the cellars before the bombardment. The man had lost his head. The planes would be back in Germany before we could unload, so I waved him off and we continued, deploying as soon as we possibly could.

## CHAPTER VI

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### A TRIP TO "HEARTBREAK"

IT WAS an easy matter to get out of town by the southern road which led to Beauvais, some forty miles south, and we were well on our way before the bombers reached Amiens. I had taken the wheel of the staff car to give Clint Curtis a rest. He was one of those fortunate people who can live on cat-naps taken anywhere, in any position, and under all circumstances. His steel helmet bumped and bumped against the window of the car as he slept soundly, slouched over in his seat, his head wobbling from side to side. But he awoke as easily as he fell asleep, and when I called to him that enemy bombers were circling over the road not far ahead, he was instantly alert.

I signalled the convoy to halt under the only trees in sight. This happened to be along the main street of a village where there was some sort of a factory with a high brick chimney, which offered

an excellent target to the planes flying above. I did not like this, and when a convoy of French gasoline trucks pulled up under the trees across the street I decided that we would be safer taking our chances on the open road. Larry Schwab made desperate gestures that he could not move, and I ran back to see what the trouble was. One of his wounded, an old woman, had slid with surprising agility off her stretcher, climbed to the ground and was performing an act of nature beside the ambulance. With some difficulty she was returned to her place and, ordering the cars to run at one-hundred-yard intervals, I led off at a good pace. It was better to jolt the wounded and get them as quickly as possible out of the danger zone.

The planes passed over us and let loose a few sprays of machine-gun bullets which did no damage. Either they thought that it was not worth wasting bombs on single cars, or else they had already dropped their deadly loads elsewhere, perhaps on Amiens.

The rest of the trip was without incident. On the road Alex Weeks filled his big repair truck and the trailer-kitchen with refugees, taking some thirty-odd in all of what appeared to him the most



helpless cases. However, this sudden calm on the road, in contrast to the excitement of a sleepless night, made it difficult to remain awake. Curtis was sleeping soundly, his helmet clicking against the window, and I found it very hard not to do the same. As the sun rose higher and warmed the inside of the car I had to struggle against nodding and wrecking the car. Several times I pulled myself out of a doze just in time to jerk the car back on the road and avoid going into a ditch. I know of few things more terrible than this overwhelming sensation of sleep when one is forced to drive. Curtis could have been awakened, but I was damned if I was going to admit my weakness; so I tried every trick imaginable to keep alert. I bit my hands until the blood came, took off my helmet and beat my head with my fists, pulled at my thinning hair until some of it came out in my hand, held one foot off the floor, then the other, and then tried holding them both in mid-air. The last ten miles were torture, but I kept on the road. Without doubt the other drivers were having the same trouble. However, when we pulled up at the Jeanne Hachette Hospital to discharge the wounded, all were present, filthy and smiling. They knew, as I

knew, that they had put across a great piece of work.

This time we were not billeted in the town, but on a hill overlooking it near the Agel Hospital. Colonel Soulier was moving to this hospital and wanted us near him. There was no shelter except trees, so we would sleep on the ground and in the ambulances—if we slept! This was not unlike the spot we had chosen at Cempuis. There was a large field for turning and plentiful green foliage to hide the trucks, kitchen, and ambulances from enemy planes. There was a sunken road into which we could jump if there was bombing. On first inspection it looked all right, and we established ourselves there.

It was still fairly early in the morning when Lieutenant Couture returned with his four cars. They had not only fetched their wounded back from Montdidier, but had also gone for a load in Amiens, arriving in time for the bombing we had luckily escaped. It had been devastating. A direct hit had taken off the end of one wing of the hospital, which rocked from the terrific explosions until it seemed about to tumble down and crush the many inmates. There must have been between

fifty and a hundred planes, Jon Thorensen said, and he feared that the town was now completely destroyed. They had just gotten away when another wave of bombers came into view. None of my men from this convoy were hurt, although it was easy to see that their nerves were badly shaken.

Only Coster and his two cars were missing now. I asked Couture if he knew where they were. They had passed him, he told me, as he came out of Amiens. Against his advice, and with the knowledge that the Germans were in one part of the town, if not all of it, Coster was courageously leading his two cars back for a last load of wounded. Clement had joined King, Wait and himself to lend a hand with the loading.

The morning dragged on, hour after hour, and still the four men did not return. Several times I drove down to the house where we had first been quartered, hoping against hope to find them waiting there. I tried to occupy my mind giving orders about the new camp, but found it impossible to take my thoughts away from my four friends. Stuart Benson and I made a mental calculation. They had been seen on the outskirts of Amiens before

seven o'clock. From there to the hospital, and the loading of two ambulances, could not have required more than half an hour. We allowed them a full hour in the event that they might have been held up in an air raid. That meant they should have been back on the highroad by eight. Two more hours, running at the very slowest speed, was all that it could have taken them to make the trip to Beauvais. If one car had had an accident the other could have towed it in, or at least brought the news and asked for a fresh car. It was hard to believe that both cars had had an accident, unless it had been by action of the enemy. Benson looked at his watch. "Eleven o'clock," he said. "That makes them an hour overdue even with the slowest calculation for the time it would ordinarily have taken." "And," I added, "they're four smart lads and would have done their job in the minimum time. They'd have been back two hours ago if nothing out of the ordinary had happened."

At noon I gave up Don Coster, Gregory Wait, George King, and John Clement as lost in action, and sent a report in to the Paris office to the effect that they had disappeared while carrying out a dangerous mission under orders from their command-

ing officer, Colonel Soulier. They had been killed, wounded, or captured on duty.

Three times I tried to get back into Amiens to see if I could find something, some trace, that would tell the story—smashed cars, spattered blood, I do not know what—but the Germans held the whole town now and the French would not allow me within several miles of it. Each trip I noticed that the volume of smoke rising above the town grew less and less dense. There was probably nothing left to burn in what one week before had been a prosperous, busy, happy place, where many thousands of citizens went about the business of living and working in peace. The lightning-war had struck and done the damage of a major earthquake. "God damn the Germans," I swore, as I returned from my last failure to enter Amiens.

In the afternoon eight cars were ordered to Crèvecœur, a small village northwest of us. I left the French lieutenant in charge and led them up. On the way we practised a new hand signal that I had invented for deploying and assembling again without stopping a convoy. As far as I knew there was nothing to cover this in the military manuals, and it seemed to me not only useful but also highly

necessary when enemy planes were sighted and one did not think it advisable to halt, as for example in the case when the road was open and there were no trees to hide under. To deploy I moved my arm slowly back and forth at about a ninety degree angle, parallel with the ground. The first cars would speed up so that the others could hold their paces and at the same time spread out until one hundred yards roughly separated each car. The signal to assemble was given by raising the arm six or eight times from the level of the open window to the top of the car. Then those in the rear had to increase their speed until they were again running at six-yard intervals. When I gave these signals they were repeated by each driver, so that there was no danger of those in the rear not seeing them.

Another most important thing that we learned on this run, something that helped us very much in the terrible days to come, was to watch any one who was passing on foot. If he was looking up towards the sky, or crouching down, or standing under trees, or running for cover, it was the danger signal that bombers were not far distant. Our cars drowned out the sound of approaching motors, but the ears of pedestrians could spot them a full thirty

seconds away, sometimes more, depending on the wind, the thinness of the air, etc. If you looked in the direction where the eyes of these human detectors were turned you invariably spotted dark planes not far away.

We could see the church steeple and some of the roofs of the village when Nazi planes began to come over in waves. There seemed to be hundreds of them, both bombers and fighters, the tiny Messerschmitts circling high above the heavy bombers like angry wasps ready to attack any intruder. The sky was literally filled with them, and while I hated the sight it fascinated me and I could not take my eyes away from it.

Luckily there were apple trees on either side of the road, and we concealed our cars under them and stood watching. They bombed Crèvecoeur (what a name—Heartbreak—for such a tragic village) time and again, until a great column of smoke rose from it. Then they ran up and down the road at low altitudes, strafing with machine-guns. Frank Hamlin and I were standing under the same tree. A bullet clipped off a leaf and it fluttered slowly to the ground under our startled gaze. "Christ!" I said to Frank. "I don't see how they missed you." We

both laughed. He was six feet six inches tall, weighed nearly three hundred pounds, and was by far the best target in the Section.

For half an hour the planes circled, and circled again, bombing and machine-gunning without opposition. Then a tiny speck roared out from nowhere, and we recognized a lone French fighter. What courage! The odds against him were certainly fifty to one. He rose at a steep angle right under the belly of the nearest bomber and let go with his machine-guns. There was a puff of smoke, a burst of flame that quickly spread, and the huge ship turned on its side, broke up, and dropped to earth with a tremendous explosion of its unused bombs. Four parachutists had jumped at the first burst of flames. One dropped straight, the parachute having refused to open. The Frenchman turned and came back with the speed and grace of a hawk. He shot down two of the parachutes in mid-air. The third landed and its occupant was seized by waiting soldiers. By the time the Messerschmitt pilots realized what was happening and dived in several squadrons the lone French hero had disappeared in the direction from which he had come. For a moment Hamlin and I stood silent,



overwhelmed by our great admiration for this display of skill and courage, then simultaneously we broke into a cheer. "If the French even had one plane for three of the Boches they could win," I said. But we knew that the odds against them were higher than that.

After this the Germans went off and we proceeded, running at hundred-yard intervals, into the village. The hospital was easy to find. It was the schoolhouse that had been pressed into service. At the moment we located it I saw the Germans coming back. The cars were grouped together on the main square, and although they were under trees one bomb could have destroyed them all; so I gave the order to deploy on the road leading out to the west. I left the staff car and hung on to one of the ambulances so that I could watch and direct. It was Johnny Cutler's car and we went like hell, the planes coming on directly above our heads. By luck, plus Johnny's skillful driving, we kept one jump ahead of the falling bombs. It reminded me of racing down the road ahead of a speeding cloud shadow that came up on you by slow degrees. We would have left one spot seconds before it was hit, then another and another. I could distinctly see

the bombs falling. They were not very large ones, and looked like fast flying-fish as they came down and crashed. Then the road turned off and we were safe for the moment.

In the field where we stopped there were several dead horses and cows from a previous bombing. Some of them had been killed by flying steel, and their wounds gaped nauseatingly and were covered with flies. Already there was stench of rotting flesh. Others had been killed by concussion. They had swelled up to double their normal size and their legs stuck up in the air. They were grotesquely funny, like freak animals in a side show, and the idea came to me that they would have been most amazed if they had had time to realize what had happened. Because a man named Adolf Hitler in faraway Berlin gave an order about going to war these peaceful cows and horses of Picardy had suddenly been changed from normal grazing animals into lifeless, balloon-shaped things with their feet in the air. I caught myself about to chuckle, perhaps laugh aloud. Of course I was tired, else I should not have had such thoughts. But I must watch my nerves. The war had only begun in earnest.

Some one was missing. A quick check showed that it was Watts. I was told that he had stopped in a side street instead of coming with us. Cutler and I went back to look for him. He was covered with dust and dirt when we found him, but outwardly was unhurt. A wall had fallen on his back as he was trying to protect a woman and her two children. It had partially buried them. By luck it was a flimsy wall and he had been able to get them out safe. He himself had a strained back which forced him, against his will, to have a couple of days of medical treatment. He seemed slightly dazed when Cutler and I came up to him. The children were crying and the mother was on her knees praying—"Sainte Jeanne d'Arc! Sainte Jeanne d'Arc!" Watts laughed nervously, and admitted that he too had been praying to Saint Joan of Arc.

The schoolhouse was filled with military and civilian wounded. I heard the medical officers cursing the Germans with particular violence, and asked a captain the reason. Without replying he beckoned to me and I followed him down a long corridor. He opened a door and I saw five French soldiers and an officer lying dead on the floor. Still this did not answer my question, as dead soldiers

were nothing unusual. After a moment he explained. "They formed the crew of a tank. While attacking the Boche one of their caterpillar treads came off and they were forced to surrender. The swine disarmed them, ordered them to do a right-about-face, and shot them point-blank in the backs of their necks. Look. You can see where the powder has singed their hair." He spat in anger. I thought of my four men who had disappeared in Amiens that morning. Jesus! Suppose the Germans were not taking any prisoners!

When we got back to camp, after having dropped the wounded at Jeanne Hachette Hospital, in Beauvais, it was dark. Much to my surprise I found the cars lined up in a field by the road, instead of under the trees. They made an excellent target in the bright moonlight, and I asked the French lieutenant the reason. He said that a priest had told him the Germans were coming into Beauvais. He thought that we had surely been captured, and explained that he was preparing to withdraw the Section, or what was left of it, farther up the road. I was furious, told the men not to move without orders from Colonel Soulier or myself, and set out to look for the priest who was spreading

false news, feeling sure that he was a fifth columnist in disguise. After his attempt to spread fear, however, he had completely vanished, swallowed up by the darkness. I told my men to grab him if they ever saw him again, but he never came back.

Although German planes did practically level Beauvais while we were there, the infantry did not occupy it for another two weeks, confirming my opinion that there was no immediate danger and that the man in priest's clothing was a fifth columnist, attempting to spread terror and panic by his lies within the French lines.

All that night we worked frantically evacuating the aged and crippled, the sick and the wounded, from the Hôtel Dieu (a sort of municipal poor-house) to the station where they were loaded into a Red Cross train for transport to a less dangerous region. We were working against time, trying to get the train out of the station before daylight when we expected a bombardment. I drove from the station to the Hôtel Dieu, back and forth again and again, hurrying, pressing, encouraging, even threatening when the work moved too slowly. As usual the Field Service men did their job beauti-

fully, but the French were inclined to lag. Beauvais had not been bombed until then, and they saw no reason for any particular haste. As a matter of fact the train had hardly pulled out when enemy planes appeared in the distance, flew over, and dropped a load of bombs, narrowly missing the station.

## CHAPTER VII

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### A MUCH INTERRUPTED LUNCHEON

I WAS lucky to have an hour and a half of sleep in the shade of an apple tree before the Colonel's orderly came to fetch me. The Colonel looked very tired, with bloodshot eyes and drawn face. He had probably slept less than I had, if that were possible. He was a kind man, one saw from his expression, and I believe that he suffered a great deal because of all the unhappiness about him. His morning handshake was firm and friendly, but his smile of welcome was sad. "They have bombed Crèvecœur again this morning," he said. "There are eighteen stretcher cases." Three into eighteen, I calculated. Each car carried three stretchers. "That will take six cars, sir. I shall go immediately." Before I left the room he told me that he had been transferred to a town in Normandy. He wished to thank the Section from the bottom of his heart. We had served under his orders for only

a few short hours really, and he had learned, he explained, to appreciate the quality of our work and the courage of my men. Would I convey to the Section his congratulations?

Wishing to leave an American in charge, so as not to have the confusion of the night before repeated, I was forced to appoint some one to replace Coster. This meant a public admission that I had given up hope for the four men who had disappeared in Amiens the day before. Obviously we all had, yet it was hard to say so out loud. I whistled the signal for assembly, delivered Colonel Soulier's message of appreciation, then tried to speak of our departed comrades. At first the words refused to come, and I stood there choking back tears and emotion. I thought of the tank crew, lying dead on the floor at Crèvecœur, shot in the backs of their necks. Frankly I feared the worst, though when words finally came I said that we must hope for the best. Harold Willis was the logical man, in my opinion, to take Coster's place, and I made the appointment, subject to the approval of our Paris office. He was a man of mature years, and at the same time possessed great physical stamina. I had unlimited confidence in his judgment, and he had



proven in the last war that his courage was not to be doubted. From the old Field Service, in which he distinguished himself, he had gone into the Lafayette Escadrille and become one of its ace pilots. He was shot down inside the German lines, and after many failures finally succeeded in swimming the Rhine to freedom. Undaunted and unafraid he returned to fight on the front again before the signing of the Armistice in 1918. His breast was covered by two rows of the highest decorations France can confer for bravery. Now he was again serving on the front as a volunteer, white-haired, robust, and fifty years of age. My choice was a happy one and I never regretted it.

This duty performed I led the six cars up to Crèvecœur, where we arrived without incident at about lunch time. The drivers opened tins of canned food and ate hastily while I went into the hospital to report that we were there and ask if we could take the wounded immediately. There was a new officer in charge, a major of colonial infantry. He was a career soldier, very young for the rank he held, and a thoroughly charming fellow, who smiled encouragingly as he went from patient to patient. With me he was most cordial. I

must come and have a bite to eat. No, there was no hurry. I *must* come. Although I wanted to get the cars out of Crèvecœur as quickly as possible there was no way of refusing politely; so we sat down at table together and an orderly was sent to fetch goose-liver patty, bread, and a bottle of red wine. Before the man arrived we saw soldiers running across the courtyard towards the entrance of a bombproof shelter. From the way they were looking up as they ran it was obvious that Nazi planes were not far away, and our lunch was interrupted. I hastened to the cars. Hod Fuller pointed out several waves of bombers coming towards us, and I gave the order to deploy on the same road where we had been the day before. Hod needed no second invitation. He was one of the last men to leave a place if it were necessary to stay, but if it was not necessary in line of duty he could get out quicker than any man I ever saw. In civilian life he was an aviator, which may explain his fast take-offs. The rest of us were not far behind.

This time the Germans did not bomb Crèvecœur. They dropped their load on an airfield outside that had been in service only a short time. The speed with which they received military in-

formation was amazing. Their system of espionage must have been very nearly perfect.

At the same time that the air field was being bombed two strange-looking planes flew back and forth over our heads in wide circles. One wing was painted white, the other gray, so that with certain cloud effects one saw only half the plane. They were some distance away to the north when I saw two white puffs leave them and float slowly towards the ground. "They're dropping parachutists behind the lines," I exclaimed. As the wind was blowing the other way they did not come towards us, so we hastened back to the village to report what we had seen. The authorities had also spotted them, and armed patrols had been sent out to scour the countryside. I could not help admiring these two lone Germans for having the courage to drop out of the skies in broad daylight onto enemy country. Undoubtedly these men are fanatics, but I still maintain that it takes courage to be a fanatic of this type who risks almost certain death to serve his cause.

Once again the Major grabbed me by the arm and led me in to luncheon. There was no hurry. The Germans would not be back so soon, he said,

and besides there were still several wounded who were receiving first aid and would not be ready for a short while. One must eat. This time the food was put on the table and we were actually reaching for it when the soldiers again ran across the courtyard in the direction of the *abri*, and the whole performance was repeated. We did not see the gray-and-white planes, however, as they had disappeared, and we never heard if the parachutists were captured or not.

After a third attempt at lunching, interrupted by a third alarm, the Major and I gave up. Meanwhile the last of the wounded had been treated and we loaded them as quickly as possible. Obviously the Boche had no good intentions towards Crève-cœur.

The one encouraging sign we saw that day was a large number of very businesslike-looking French tanks on the road. They were headed towards the front, and gave us hope that the counter-attack which we had been expecting might be in preparation. Alas! it never came.

Again that night we worked from hospitals to the station, loading Red Cross trains until very late. When finally we were able to throw ourselves on

stretchers, or here and there for a sleep, we were truly exhausted. Clinton Curtis shared an ambulance with some one and I curled up in the back seat of the staff car, fully clothed, not even removing my boots. At any moment I knew that I might be called, and I wanted to be ready to obey at once. Through the car's open window I could hear rumblings from the town below as the great convoys of trucks and tanks passed through. The military movement in Beauvais was enormous, but I could not tell whether the convoys were moving towards the front or away from it. I rather thought, judging from what I had seen earlier, that they were moving up. And we had seen, all during the early part of the evening, regiment after regiment of Senegalese infantry heading north. They moved silently, their black faces sullen and without expression, and many carried their packs balanced on their heads, preferring this to the more orthodox method of carrying them on their backs. Head-balancing was a habit they had learned in their own African homes, so they stuck to it here. Despite lack of expression they had a cruel look, and I have heard that the Germans feared them. Personally I have never considered them great

fighters except on the attack, and this again made me think that the offensive might not be far off. We wanted that offensive badly, feeling that the French could cut off at the base this pencil-like thrust that the Boche had made as far to the east as Abbeville. While it is only a guess, I still believe that this tactic might have been successful in delaying France's defeat, thus giving the English time to reorganize their forces and swing into battle. But I am not a military man by profession, and I really do not know. One thing I do know, however, is that the great French Army could have put up much stiffer resistance to the enemy had it been properly commanded by the men in high places. Even a rank amateur of war, like myself, can see that. Of course, at the time, I still did not believe that the Germans could conquer the country—certainly not in a few weeks.

As I listened to the strange, rumbling noises from below, and tried to figure the situation out in my tired mind, I heard still another noise, the welcome sound of rain. I hoped that it would come down hard, probably prayed that it would, and make the ground so soft and slippery that the heavy bombers would not be able to take off from soggy

fields in the morning. With that comforting thought I fell into a troubled sleep, dreaming a fantastic mixture of all that had happened since we left Paris only four days before. The men played an important part in my dreams, particularly Coster, King, Wait, and Clement. I was trying hard to save them from burning buildings in what must have been Amiens, and the walls collapsed, not exactly burying them, but cutting them off from my view. Then Charlie Stehlin, the smallest and youngest driver in the Section, and Hamlin, the biggest, walked calmly, hand-in-hand, out of the ruins towards me. They seemed to have some huge joke between them and they were laughing. Before they reached me a bomb fell squarely on them and there was nothing left except a huge crater in the street. A parachutist from a gray-and-white plane dropped slowly in my direction, pointing a machine-gun at me, and as he was about to come down on my head he and the parachute went up in a puff of black smoke. A strange, persistent noise that I did not recognize woke me up. It was rain coming down hard on the roof of my car, and outside misty daylight spread over the countryside.

"Ah," I thought when I was thoroughly awake.

"They'll be stuck in the mud today, the lousy bastards." Stuck in the mud! But so would we if we did not hurry and get the cars out of the field. This had not occurred to me before, and I cursed my lack of forethought.

A walk around the encampment showed me that the ground was already quite soggy, and that there was no time to lose before we should be completely bogged in. The ambulances and staff car were light enough and could probably still cross over the field to the road, but I was worried about the trucks and especially the kitchen.

McElwain was the first person I saw. He was on the ground in a sleeping-bag, his head in a pool of water, and sleeping as soundly as if he had been at home in his Boston house. "Get up, Mac," I yelled. He opened an eye. "You're getting pretty tough." He grinned at this. It pleased him. He wanted to toughen up, and certainly succeeded. Despite the fact that he had passed the forty mark in age, and had led a far too sheltered life, he turned out to be one of the old war horses upon whom I could count in any emergency, and at any time of the day or night. He was one of the first to receive his well-deserved citation for the *Croix de Guerre*.



"Get up," I repeated, "and help me rout out the fellows. We must move from here quickly, or else. . . ."

Mac crawled out, like a hermit crab from its shell, fully dressed. He, too, had wanted to be ready and on call. In fact most of the men had slept like this, and we had every one on his feet in a few minutes. The staff car ran across the field easily, but the ambulances were heavier and had to be pushed. Their wheels spun helplessly in the mud and they gave us some trouble, especially the ones that had been parked on the far side of a slope. The light repair truck was not difficult to handle, and after we got it out all hands stood by to help Weeks with the heavy truck and kitchen. They were dangerously near the sunken road.

"All set?" Weeks shouted. He was at the wheel and the men were divided between the truck and kitchen, ready to push. "All set," I answered, and the wheels began to turn, slowly at first and then faster, shooting out globs of mud behind. The trailer swung nearer the sunken road, which dropped a sheer eight feet, and I yelled for those on that side to clear out. Most of them did and escaped. Only Hamlin got the order too late and crashed over the

edge. For a moment I thought the kitchen would surely topple on him, and I breathed again only when Weeks, with his usual skill, pulled it clear and into the field.

When we got down to Hamlin he was in great pain. He had managed to crawl a few yards, also thinking that the kitchen was coming over on top of him. His huge body lay sprawled flat on the ground and he was moaning slightly. It was his right leg, he said, and we hurried to get the boot off before it swelled.

The doctor who examined the leg said that the foot was fractured in two places, and that it would take some time to knit. Hamlin did not agree. "I'll get some kind of a cast put on it," he told me when the doctor was not within earshot. "I'll be back to help you in a couple of days. Maybe a week at most." He smiled through tears when I sent him off to Paris in his own ambulance with another driver, and I hated like hell to see this swell big guy, with his dirty face and four-day beard, leave the Section. He was the driver of my Number 1 car, and topnotch in everything he did. The doctor, unfortunately, was right and the convalescence

was long. Frank Hamlin never returned to the Section.

Also Moore and Folds were not improving, and I sent them to Paris. That meant the loss of seven men in four days. I began to get nervous. We could not hold out very long and properly operate the cars if the casualty list continued to mount at this rate.

Obviously the field where we had been bivouacked was not a satisfactory place, and I asked permission of the Colonel, a new man of whom I was not too fond, to locate something else. He said that we could go ahead, and we found not far away the ideal place. It consisted of two large, open hay shelters with tile roofs. One of the shelters contained farm machinery, which we moved out to make place for the cars. The other was partially filled with baled hay. This one we used for dormitory and refectory, and it was very satisfactory, even pleasant. The tables and benches were brought up from the house we had first occupied in the town, and bales of hay were used to block off "apartments." My own particular general headquarters, bedroom, sitting-room and bath, which I

shared with Willis and Benson, was a long room, open at one end, which was ordinarily reserved for cows. We tried to sweep away the straw and chaff that covered the floor, but found that our predecessors had left much filth over a period of many years, and therefore decided to leave well enough alone. Although the chaff got into our eyes, beds, down our backs and into the baggage, it at least had the advantage of absorbing some of the odor remaining from the departed cows. A table, a chair, stretchers on bales of hay as beds, and we were quite comfortably installed. This was to be our home, more or less happy, until the day the Germans moved into Beauvais.

## CHAPTER VIII

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### WORK AND PLAY

ONE of the first things we did in our new quarters was to build a shelter of hay bales against flying bomb splinters. The men who worked on this detail were very proud of their job, and it was the "show place" for our limited number of visitors. The only trouble was that it never served, and, as far as I know, no one ever entered it except to point out its splendid qualities. When bombers came over the boys had too much curiosity to go under cover. They wanted to see what was happening. Little by little the shelter disappeared as French soldiers carried away the bales either to feed their horses or to sleep on.

Foraging parties went out, when there was a moment to spare, and brought back many useful articles to improve our standard of living. Fresh eggs, chickens, rabbits, vegetables and, prize of prizes, a fifty-gallon keg of excellent red wine. Also

they found rubber boots for the whole Section, as well as wash basins and buckets. The last-named were particularly useful, the only water coming from a spigot in a farmyard across the road. A very handy place to wash was rigged up simply by putting the basins in a row on bales of hay, with the buckets, filled by a water detail, on the ground beside them. Like good soldiers we took the limited material at our disposal and made the most of it. I believe these fellows could have made a comfortable home in the midst of the Sahara Desert, water or no water.

In view of the fact that the foraging parties were always carefully supplied in advance with written authorizations to requisition, I was particularly annoyed when the new Colonel (I do not remember his name, if I ever knew it) called me before him at the officers' mess and asked if any of our men had taken a pair of field glasses from the military police. Not even the fact that some one had stolen the M.P.'s only pair of glasses amused me. I was furious. He said that he had heard of our foraging parties and would like a report on the matter. I replied that he would have his report in

a moment, saluted more stiffly than usual, turned on my heel and went out.

There had been three details, I knew, but I wanted to check on who had led them. Willis had led one, Jon Thorensen a second, and the Colonel's own sergeant the third. Of course, none of our men had been near the quarters of the military police. We did not even know where they were located.

I asked Willis to come back with me to the officers' mess. "May I make my report, *mon Colonel?*" He nodded. "Sergeant Thil of your hospital staff led one of the three details. I suppose he had the proper papers and is beyond suspicion. A second was headed by my driver, Jon Thorensen, who happens to be the nephew of the Minister of Norway to France. He had a written authorization and I can testify that he is beyond suspicion. The third was led by Lieutenant Willis here, my second in command." I made a motion towards Willis' breast, covered with the highest honors France can confer for bravery, ribbons of medals that the Colonel himself did not possess. I went on to point out that my men were volunteers in every sense of the

word, serving France without remuneration. Not only that, but also those who had come from America expressly, or from any other distance, had paid their own transportation, purchased their own kit and uniforms, and on an average had spent between forty and fifty thousand francs of their personal money for the privilege of being here. From the corners of my eyes I could see the other officers fidgeting in their discomfort, and the Colonel himself was growing redder by the minute. But I was mad and had not finished yet. I would go through with the report for which he had asked. "And, *mon Colonel*, two of the men gave the ambulances they are driving. That, at the present exchange, comes to about ninety thousand francs additional. Another of my men has given an ambulance anonymously, I learned quite by accident, to be used in a future section. We have not seen the field glasses of the military police, sir. That is all. May Lieutenant Willis and I be excused?" He had seen his mistake and showed the good sense to get up and come over to where we were standing. His excuse, however, was weak. "Of course," he said, "it never entered my head that one of your men might have



stolen the glasses. I only thought they might have been taken by mistake."

After that the Colonel gave us no trouble, and was relatively easy to handle, if a lieutenant may be said to handle a colonel. But I never liked him, and was glad when tough little Major Martene, with his hard-boiled ways and tender heart, and eleven years' active service with the Foreign Legion, took over the command about a week later.

Our most fastidious member was William Nickerson. During these troubled times he could be seen every morning, when he was not on duty, stark naked taking a full-length sponge bath. It was as regular as the clock, and several times the bombers not only caught him with his pants down, but with no pants on at all. He had with loving care arranged a place for himself out under an apple tree about a hundred yards from camp, and another near the dining table, which he surrounded with bales. He would stay first in one then the other, as the spirit moved him. "I like a change," he said, when I asked for an explanation of all this luxury. "When I am tired of my town house," he pointed to the sleeping bag stretched out on the

ground under the shed, "I move out to my country place. The change of air and scenery does me good." He had a quiet sense of humor and an over-developed imagination. The former helped him, but the latter caused him to suffer a great deal more than the rest of us from the horrors of war.

Stuart Benson, artist and noted sculptor, was also one of our more meticulous gentlemen. However, he limited himself to one "home," and that was on a bale of hay near my stretcher. If he snored I don't know it, because, as far as I could learn, he never slept. Nervous, high-strung and charming, he was a friend on whom I could count for any service and know in advance that it would be well done. He painted the signs for the entrance gate, to show that the American Field Service lived within, and for our "office," to indicate where General Headquarters was located. Or he was equally obliging and competent when it came to leading a convoy of wounded over many miles on the darkest nights. He grabbed my arm one day and said there was something he wanted to tell me. Very important, a sort of confession which he had to make to ease his conscience. I had not the vaguest idea what he was driving at. What could a fellow

like that have on his conscience? I knew he had been a major in the American Army during the last war, and that for his services he wore on his chest ribbons of the Legion of Honor, the *Croix de l'Etoile Noire*, and the *Croix de Guerre*. And I had always thought him very young-looking and active for a man of fifty-three, which was the age noted on his application paper. Arm in arm we walked into a vacant field, and he began his confession. "Pete, I've lied." This rather brutal statement startled me, and I waited for him to go on. "I lied about my age to get into this damned thing. Luckily I didn't have to show my passport or birth certificate, but I've been scared to death somebody would find out. I pulled ten years off my age." This dumbfounded me and I stuttered. "You—you mean—you're—" "Yes," he cut in, "I'm sixty-three years old." When I finally grasped the fact that he was telling the truth I laughed and laughed. He had looked so sheepish, almost like a school child about to face punishment for a misdemeanor, when he told me this, and I thought it was one of the swellest things I had heard in my whole life. He had pulled his age down a whole decade in order to get to the front, and was ashamed of the lie. I

could have kissed him on both cheeks, French fashion, and given him all the *Croix de Guerres* in the army. I think he was surprised that I was not angry.

Little Charlie Stehlin was on the opposite end of the ladder. The day he arrived in the Paris office, on his return from Finland, to sign up with us, was the eighteenth anniversary of his birth. Benson, who was twenty-one years my senior, had turned forty-five when Charlie was born. The kid had plenty of spirit and guts. He had joined the Iroquois Ambulance Unit soon after its formation, and seeing that it was not getting anywhere had seized an opportunity to go to Finland as an airplane machine-gunner. There were six others from the Iroquois with him, but unfortunately the Finns had not been able to supply them with planes, so he came back and joined the Field Service. Folds had also made the unsuccessful trip to the North. Charlie was sent out on a mission one day, and I noticed that there was a good deal of bombing in the direction he had taken. On his return I asked if he had been in any of it. "In it," he said, and from the intonation of his voice one would have thought that the whole German air force had been

out to get him. "In it. Say, you're lucky to have *me* back." He was young, and his sense of humor had not been highly developed, so I let this go without a smile, at least without a visible smile. His work was good and he never muffed a job, which was more important to me than a sense of humor. Along with McElwain, Thorensen and Rich, he was the first to receive a citation for the *Croix de Guerre*.

I do not know what it is about war that makes men grow beards. Perhaps it is the all-absorbing interest of war that makes one forget about one's personal aspect, although I do not believe this to be the reason. More probably the explanation is that in civilian life they have always wondered what they would look like with something hairy on the chin, and have been too timid to try the experiment for fear of ridicule. One cannot ridicule a soldier who is on the front and constantly under fire, so this gives courage to experiment with one's beard-growing abilities. Be that as it may, at best only my theory, four of the drivers, encouraged by the days and nights of great activity which had not left them time to shave, let their beards grow. Oddly enough each one of them took on the ap-

pearance of a universally known character, and Ralph Munger took on the personality, in appearance only I hope, of two rather dreaded individuals. He looked like a mixture of Lenin and Trotsky, a sort of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde idea, only in this case both bad. Queer things beards do, for Munger had far more of the Doctor Jekyll in him than of the men he resembled. On the other hand there was Bill Nickerson. His thin, nervous face, partially covered with a heavy growth of reddish hair, had something Christlike in its expression, yet no one would ever have dreamed in his wildest moments of accusing Nick of having any Christlike qualities. Johnny Cutler took between ten days and two weeks to turn himself into a youthful Honest Abe Lincoln, the hard-working rail splitter. Johnny was honest, certainly, and tops as an ambulance driver, but I am sure that if I had told him to split rails he would have asked me why, and slipped away from the job to catch a sleep as soon as my back was turned. Hard work, except ambulance driving, and Johnny Cutler just did not get along well together. The only one who really seemed to fit the part, in our private Passion Play, for which nature and his hirsute qualities

equipped him was Laurence W. Morgan, age twenty-two, Brookline, Mass., Harvard '39. With such a pedigree he must, of course, play a royal part, and instead of resembling Lenin, Trotsky, Honest Abe, or even Christ, he turned slowly, as the days passed and the chin hairs grew, from Larry Morgan into Henry the Eighth. He resembled that great monarch in that he could do amazing things with food, and I am sure that he would have loved the six wives, although I am equally sure he would have had none of them executed. At heart Larry was a conservative person.

Rats were quite a problem, especially in the cow shed, until Grima Johnson arrived bearing a peculiar-looking mongrel which he had picked up along the road somewhere. Bomber was the first name it received, and this was later discarded for Blitzzy. This stuck, and Blitzzy became a prime favorite with the Section. It was a mixture of wire-haired fox and most anything else one can imagine, with floppy ears and a quizzical expression. Be that as it may, one could forgive Blitzzy's doubtful parentage when one considered his qualities as a rat catcher. There, at least, this dog was an undisputed champion. I personally watched him dive under

the stretcher on which I slept, scratch a bit, growl, and bring out a father, mother and five baby rats, all with their necks broken in the most approved manner.

But watching Blitzzy was not our only sport in the rare moments of calm. We tried baseball. Cutler had a bat and ball, and on one memorable occasion we actually got as far as choosing sides before the bombers routed us from the field. This time there were dog-fights and two planes, one French and one German, hurtled to the ground in flames. We gave up baseball, finding it difficult to concentrate under the circumstances.

Hutchinson's hat afforded a certain amount of amusement and distraction for tired nerves. It was a large straw affair, farmer type, and Hutch was about as fond of it as Grima was of the dog. At first it amused the boys to grab it from his head and toss it about while he rushed from one to the other in a desperate effort to recapture his treasure. But even the novelty of this wore off as nearly all the scrimmages were interrupted by the bugler across the way whose duty it was to blow three blasts whenever the Boches were coming over. His tooting, off and on all through the day, became



monotonous, and Cam Burrage tried to solve the problem. He brought from one of his various trips a child's tin horn and tooted back. The effect was amusing only for a very short while, and failed to stop the bugler, to whom orders were orders.

One must admit that our pleasures were simple, even puerile. We took them when we could and where we could, trying hard to forget the true grimness of our life, the horror of all that was going on around us, trying to ignore the constant danger which threatened our lives and those of our friends, hoping to get a laugh from hearts that felt crushed and where few laughs remained. This was a war of nerves, and, being non-combatants who could not fight back with arms, we had to resist a most terrible enemy with our own foolish little inventions.

This foolishness helped. In fact it was necessary when one considers that we rarely had any sleep, and never a moment's rest for our tired, frayed nerves. We had to protect them as something vital to our very existence. Once our nerves were gone we would become useless, and this we wished to avoid at any price, even the risk of seeming childish. In the last war one worked under a strain for

a short period at the front and then went back a few miles to where it was calm and a simple matter to pull oneself together and be fresh to return for more. This time there was no such thing as rest for mind or body. We would carry loads of wounded thirty or forty miles to the rear, with German planes continually strafing the roads, only to arrive at the hospital as it was being violently bombed. I cannot say how long the human nervous system could stand up against this sort of warfare. It is my firm belief, however, that the average man would break after three months, and that even the toughest could not endure over half a year.

Often when I had a moment free I walked over to the Agel Hospital, about three hundred yards up the road, and visited the *triage*. This is the room where the freshly wounded are received, given first aid and assigned to the different wards, or sent to the operating room. In this particular hospital four operating tables were occupied night and day. I would wander from one *blessé* to another, examining their open wounds and wondering at their heroic calm. It was extraordinary to me the way they accepted their fate without a whimper.

In one corner there was an aviator. I had seen

him shot down in flames that afternoon by six Messerschmitts, and was amazed that he had come out alive. I asked how he had done it, but he did not know. The skin was burned away from his face and his eyes were tightly closed. Perhaps he was blind. The doctor could not tell until the swelling went down. The flyer mumbled something through swollen lips, and I listened closely. He was saying that next time the Boches would not get him so easily. He was already thinking of his return to fight in defense of France. And there were millions more like him, men who would have defended their country to the last, had they been given half a chance. A succession of rotten governments had sold them out; a general staff of doddering old men, thinking in terms of 1914-18, had sent them to be slaughtered; politicians like Pierre Cot, who now has the audacity to tell this United States of America, by interviews in the press, what should have been done and what should be done, had destroyed their aviation.

This heroic aviator, sitting in the *triage*, perhaps blinded and tortured by pain, mumbling about what he would do when he got back on the lines, is the real France. Never accuse the true French-

man of cowardice, do not blame him for his defeat. Blame the senile old men and dishonest politicians, the former because they were impotent and incapable of helping their country, the latter because they placed their bank accounts above patriotism.

As I look back on what has happened I know that France was overwhelmed—but is she beaten? Not the France that I know, not the men like this mumbling, wounded aviator. It is my firm belief, certainly my greatest hope, that General Charles de Gaulle, who represents the spirit of the France I love, will march one day at the head of his army of free Frenchmen, up the Champs-Élysées and through the Arc de Triomphe, a conquering hero.

Red Cross nurses in the *triage* worked marvelously. Their faces were pale and drawn with fatigue, yet they continued hour after hour, calmly and efficiently doing their jobs. Never have I admired women more than I did these girls, many of them out of gentle homes and straight from civilian life, as I watched them go about their gruesome work, cleaning wounds, clipping off jagged bits of flesh, swabbing oil on burns of several tank corps men, dressing and bandaging. Their devotion and courage were beautiful to see.

In another corner, across from the burned aviator, I spotted an English Tommy, and wandered over to talk with him. When I spoke in his own tongue he smiled feebly and asked for a cigarette. I hope my face did not express the shock which I received when I leaned over to give it to him. I had smelt the terrible odor—gangrene! The mask of death was slowly spreading over his youthful features, yet he could still smile and ask for a cigarette. In a place like this there are many odors, but none so sickening and ghastly as that of gangrene. It is indescribably horrible, not only because it spells death, or at best amputation, but also because it is the worst smell in the world. After I gave the boy a package of cigarettes, lighting one for him with a trembling hand, I was forced to go out into the night for air.

## CHAPTER IX

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### THE BOMBING OF BEAUVAIS

AT ABOUT this time there was a strange moment of calm in the German activities. They were probably consolidating their positions, gathering their forces in preparation for a terrific blow. Be that as it may, I decided to run into Paris for a day and night. It was only an hour away, and I felt sure that I would be back in Beauvais before anything broke. There were certain things that I should talk over with my superiors, and then I could see Josette. It seemed like years since we had said good-bye to each other a week ago.

What sort of a change I expected to discover in Paris after such a short time I do not know, but I was highly shocked to find it totally unchanged. People went about life just as before I left, apparently without concern for what was happening up in Picardy. Food was plentiful and delicious, cafés and restaurants filled, and night clubs hanging out

the standing-room-only sign. It seemed fantastic after all I had witnessed, like another planet. Did they not realize what was happening? Could they ignore the danger? Had they been kept in ignorance of the refugees and of the fighting? Was this ignorance, or indifference, or both? I asked myself the question again and again. Now they had not even the illusion of their Maginot Line. I did not attempt to understand, but followed their example and tried to forget for a few short hours in Josette's excellent company.

In Beauvais nothing had happened when I returned. Calm reigned, and I felt even more sure than before that it was the calm before the storm. Something terrible was brewing. I could feel it.

We were glad to see new faces when Stuart Benson brought back from Paris one evening three French Army cinema operators, two journalists, and a movie star. The cinema men were going to make a documentary picture of our work. Unfortunately the officer in command of Beauvais refused them permission to do this, despite the fact that they had the necessary papers from the War Ministry. The journalists were Quentin Reynolds, writing for *Collier's*, and Kenneth Downs, of the In-

ternational News Service, both out for a story. The star in our rather troubled sky was Robert Montgomery. Stuart and I guided them through Agel Hospital, the *triage* and operating room, then down to the railway station to see the loading of a Red Cross train by the Section ambulances. Bob Montgomery helped out on a car that night with Larry Morgan.

In the morning, just after sunrise, there was a certain amount of fireworks as anti-aircraft guns and machine guns potted intermittently at Nazi observation planes. But I felt that I had neglected my duty as host in failing to give them a really first-rate bombing.

The cameramen and journalists returned to Paris. Montgomery stayed on. He had signed up with the Field Service in London, and was assigned to the Section. The men and I had frankly been a little leery of Bob, and there had been some speculation as to how he would work out. For one I decided to treat him just as I treated the other drivers. I was wrong if I had thought that he expected special treatment. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the work, doing the dull jobs as well as the interesting ones willingly. I congratulated myself on the



addition of a good man to the Section, and the fellows spoke of him as a "swell guy," the highest compliment they could pay. Bob had trouble, however, about his contracts and was able to stay with us only two or three days, during which time he saw comparatively little action, and I was sincerely sorry to see him forced to leave on account of business reasons.

One of my many trips took me into the charming town of Compiègne, fifty miles north of Paris. I had lived there off and on for the past six years, and knew every stick and stone of the place. It was a famous horse country, stag hunting being the favorite pastime, and I had ridden a great deal over the beautiful bridle-paths through the forest. It was here that the Armistice was signed in 1918. It was here, in the same railway car of 1918 and on the same spot, that Hitler signed the Armistice of 1940.

Jon Thorensen was with me when I went there this time. On our way we had seen many German bombers passing high above us to the south. I counted sixty. In this part of the country they dropped propaganda leaflets, advising the French to lay down their arms and refuse to fight England's battle, and so forth. Jon and I found several

leaflets along the road. These same planes continued on their way and joined others, coming together from different directions, to bomb Paris for the one and only time during the war. I thought it an odd idea to drop tracts proposing peace in the country and bombs in the city. There is no explaining the German mentality, but it seems to have worked admirably in the conquest of France.

We found that the Hun planes had visited Compiègne a day or two before us. The center of the town from the bridge over the Oise to the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville was still smoking. Luckily they had not touched the fine old fifteenth-century Town Hall itself, as everything about it was laid flat. I pointed out the landmarks, so familiar to me, around the square. It was hard, even by using my imagination, to believe that the heap of smouldering bricks and debris on that corner had once been the animated tobacco shop in which I had bought hundreds of packages of my favorite cigarettes. It was equally difficult to recognize the wine shop across the street that had supplied my liquid needs and quenched my thirst. And farther along, the sad remains of the cleaning shop that had kept my clothes in order. I think what

hurt me most was the store of my kindly old boot-maker. There was nothing left save an empty space, a bomb having landed directly on it. "My God!" I exclaimed to Jon, at the same time looking down at my feet. "The fellow made the boots I'm wearing."

Coming back to Beauvais we passed through some of the towns that had been destroyed in the last war, and I remarked that many of the houses razed by recent bombings were the ones reconstructed since 1918 with reparations money from the Germans. They had not stood long, these poor, ugly little brick dwellings, and the same families had been chased from them twice in a generation by the invading Boche. The popular belief that bombs or shells never strike the same object more than once was proved to be a fallacy.

Every day the little cemetery grew. It was on the spot where our camp had been when Hamlin had his accident, and the dead from Agel Hospital were buried there. Side by side, in graves marked with modest wooden crosses, slept heroes from England, France, Morocco, Tunis, Senegal, Algeria, and Germany. The Germans were treated like the rest. Though they were enemies the French

did not forget that they had died for country and were heroes. One grave apart was that of a French colonel. His nerves had broken, his heart also perhaps, and he had committed suicide. The passage of stretcher-bearers, carrying the dead from hospital to field, became more and more frequent with the growing intensity of the war, until it was an almost endless chain.

Once again I made a hurried trip into Paris. This time it was to enlist in the motorized cavalry of the Foreign Legion. This was no gesture of bravery on my part. On the contrary, I fear that I was looking for an easier job than ambulance work. Motorized cavalry is formed of scout units composed mostly of mounted machine guns and armored cars. At least in this branch of the service one had the chance of shooting back and defending oneself. Ambulance men take it on the chin in the toughest sort of way, and then have to turn the other cheek for more. I passed my examinations and would have received a commission as second lieutenant, had not the war ended so abruptly.

Of course I did not wish to leave the Section, but I felt that I had organized it in such a way that it could now be run without me, and therefore my

usefulness was ended. However, the real reason for my wishing to join the Foreign Legion was the fact that the old Lafayette Escadrille was being reformed, and to get into it I would have to pass via the Legion. Willis was one of the leaders in this movement, along with Doctor Edmond Gros, of the American Hospital at Neuilly, and Paul Rockwell, a hero of the last war and brother of Kiffin, who was killed while serving with the Escadrille. I was some years past the age for a pilot, but in view of my extraordinary eyesight and general physical condition, Willis assured me that he could put me through. Sadly enough this effort was wasted.

We were awakened one morning at dawn by the gunfire to the southeast, and not very far away. I listened carefully. It was *not* anti-aircraft, but cannon, and I thought we must be flanked on that side at least. It seemed impossible that the Germans could have advanced that far, although I had long since arrived at the conclusion that nothing was impossible. All morning long the barrage kept up, at times more violent than others, and I was worried. The sound of drum-fire barrages was all too familiar to me from the last war, and here was one

if it ever existed. None of the French officers knew what it was and co-ordination was so bad in the army that they could not find out. Finally Watts came back from a trip to Senlis with the explanation. The Germans had scored a direct hit with a bomb on an ammunition train in the railway station at Meru. The place, he said, was a shambles and the train was burning. Of the station there remained absolutely nothing standing. A piece of flying steel from an exploding shell had crashed into a wall just in front of him as he hurried past, filling his eyes with brick-dust.

The errand he returned from had been a strange one. Dave Burton was driving with Watts, and they told us the story. They had carried a crazy woman from a village near Beauvais back to the hospital at Senlis. Her particular mania was undressing. Several times they got her clothes back on with great difficulty, but on arriving at Senlis their attention had been attracted by passing German bombers and they had forgotten her peculiarity. An attendant from the hospital opened the ambulance doors and she dashed out, clothed only in Nature's dress, across the lawn at full speed with several people in pursuit. We laughed at this story,

certainly more sad than amusing, which showed that our nerves were getting bad. I have seen very nervous people laugh at the funeral of some one they loved.

"Nick's summer home has been bombed," I heard one of the boys say excitedly. Nickerson also heard the remark and rushed out to his favorite apple tree. A wag had carefully gathered bits of steel from a bomb that burst in a near-by field, and had hammered them into the trunk of the tree in a most realistic manner. Nick was excited and showed it to every one. I think he was quite proud of his summer home now that it had become so important, but I noticed that from then on he gave it up in favor of the town house. He might have hung out a For Rent sign for all he used it after that.

Ralph Munger came to me one morning, looking more like Lenin and Trotsky than ever, and said that his side-kick, David Stetson, had disappeared during the night and had taken their car with him. He thought he knew where Stet was and could lead me there, so we climbed into the staff car and started out on a search. It was a small country road, leading in the direction of Amiens,

over which Ralph directed me. All along the sides were machine-gun nests, heavily camouflaged and manned by Senegalese troops, who watched us suspiciously. American Field Service was written in large letters across the doors of my car, but there was not much difference in their sluggish minds between the words "American" and "Allemand." Many times we were stopped and asked for our papers, and I wondered how Stet could have passed through here in the night without a special permit, which I knew he did not have. There were also many gun emplacements beside this road, the famous seventy-five millimeter cannon being most in evidence, and we passed a long line of tanks waiting in a forest. The French seemed prepared to put up stiff resistance here. Farther on a German armored car, destroyed and cast aside, showed that there had already been fighting.

I knew that Munger and Stetson had already been up here to work at an advanced post, and my companion explained that this had been on Stetson's mind. He had wanted to return, knowing that ambulances were needed, but had not asked my permission as I could not have given it without the Colonel's orders.



Ralph's guess was correct. We found the car and the driver, and I had great difficulty trying to be severe. I told him that I would not punish him this time, but the next. . . . And I explained, which was true, that it would be impossible for me to run an efficient Section if this sort of thing happened. "Suppose," I said, "one morning I find that all of the drivers have had similar ideas during the night. Where will I be when the Colonel calls for a dozen ambulances?" Munger drove the car back, and that was that.

And so our life went on for nearly two weeks at Beauvais. "Never a dull moment," some one remarked facetiously. Part of our work was long hauls, even as far back as Paris, although most of it consisted of shorter runs towards the front, or between the local hospitals and Red Cross trains.

My job now consisted mainly of spending my nights and days on the station platform at Beauvais and directing the unloading of the ambulances, getting them out as quickly as possible from this nasty spot, or driving to the hospitals and hurrying up the loading there when it was not going fast enough. We were running the cars directly onto the platform, so that the wounded could be moved

from car to train without putting them on the ground or carrying them by hand any distance, thus speeding the movement considerably. If there happened to be no cars in when the bombers came over I would drive full tilt up the road and stop any ambulances until the Germans passed off. The station was a most unhealthy place.

Section One received compliment after compliment from high French officials, during these distressing times, for its splendid work under continuous bombardment. And it is my proudest boast that *there is not a single case where one of my men failed in his duty*, not a solitary wounded or sick soldier or civilian, man, woman or child, that was not brought back by my drivers when they were instructed to do so. After the smoke of battle cleared away and the Armistice was signed we found ourselves richer by three army citations for the Section, and eighteen individual *Croix de Guerre* citations for the men. In five weeks of active service our twenty cars (the two lost at Amiens had been replaced) handled the amazing number of twelve thousand five hundred sick and wounded, mostly stretcher cases. Sections during the last war rarely handled as many wounded in a year. But every-

thing was like this in 1940—more terrible, more concentrated.

Beauvais had been bombed quite regularly ever since our return from Amiens. One day, however, the Traitor of Stuttgart (supposedly a Frenchman who was broadcasting from that city) announced by radio that at 2 P.M. Nazi planes would begin in earnest to flatten out the city. We waited anxiously. The Traitor's word was kept to the minute, and from that time on the Germans were constantly over the town, wave upon wave of them, dropping their tons of bombs.

After each raid our cars would comb the streets for wounded. Twice I saw direct hits on the cathedral, one of the loveliest in France, and fires began to spring up everywhere. As most of the water-mains were cut there was no means of combating them. We pulled the dead and wounded from the Hôtel Dieu, which was in ruins, and out of the hospitals, which were equally smashed, and from houses that had caved in on their occupants. The place that had been our home on that first night out of Paris was hit by incendiary bombs and burned to the ground. The ambulances were continually being covered by debris and flying glass from ex-

plosions, and it was difficult to get about now as many of the streets were blocked and wires everywhere were down. Bombs rained ceaselessly all around us, killing and wounding hundreds of people, and not one of us was touched, not even a scratch. We seemed to have our own private guardian angel. Or were we just plain shot with luck?

There had been a slight lull and most of the cars were in camp. The men were lying about on the hay and in the open, getting as much sleep as they could, when and where they were able, like good soldiers. I saw a lone German scout plane fly over very high. As it came above us a white sphere dropped from it. I thought it was a parachute and hastened to warn the company of soldiers billeted in the farm across the road. But the sphere did not drop. It must have been a small balloon, some kind of signal, and shortly afterwards we received the worst bombing I have ever seen.

As soon as the planes had gone I got our commanding officer's permission and we rushed down into the town. It was in shambles. The station, where I had been not half an hour before, was flat, and a Red Cross train flamed from end to end on the tracks by the platform. It was the train we

were supposed to load that night. Luckily it was still empty.

We helped French soldiers drag five people from under a house that had collapsed. They were piled one on top of the other, oddly enough. The two on top were dead, and so were the two on the bottom. A man in the center was completely unharmed, and we soon revived him. He grabbed his mutilated wife and shook her, crying madly, "You can't be dead! You can't!" Before another crumbled house a woman stood rocking unsteadily on her feet and pulling at her hair. She mumbled crazily something about her three children being inside. There was no use looking for them, even had this been possible. Fire was already beginning and had smothered them if they had escaped death by the explosion. We went on, running in and out of burning houses, shouting to find if any one was there, and hurrying the wounded up to Agel for first aid. People wandered about the streets half crazed, calling out names and weeping. Why the civilian population had not left Beauvais I could not understand. Only after this bombing were they ordered to evacuate.

## CHAPTER X

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### RETREAT

THE German Army was advancing swiftly and we received instructions to retreat to Corbeil-Cerf. Six cars were to wait until the hospital was completely evacuated to be sure that no other wounded came in to Agel. I sent the main convoy back with Harold Willis, and waited to bring up the rear. Clouds hung low and there was a heavy mist. I thanked my own particular saints for this, as it would keep the planes away. Even now I love a rainy day, and heave a sigh of relief when I look out of my window in the morning to find the earth well hidden beneath a blanket of pea-soup fog. This must be a hangover from war days when the most beastly weather was our best friend and protector.

The morning drew on. French cars were emptying the hospital, and we were held back, being much faster. Would they *never* finish their work? The hours seemed very long, and I kept my eyes

on the clouds. Shortly after eleven o'clock they began to lift, and almost at the same time the sound of airplane motors, quantities of them, came to our ears. Then there was a terrifying scream of sirens, followed by machine-gun bursts and bomb explosions. They were the Stukas—the dreaded dive bombers!

Down they came, full speed ahead, sirens shrieking, machine-guns rattling, one after another, and dropped their bombs. Then down again and again, with only the machine-guns and sirens, until we were so covered with dust and smoke that they could see us no longer. I had watched them from behind the trunk of a tree, carefully keeping on the far side as protection against machine-gun bullets, and the pilots' heads had been visible, so low had they flown their planes.

Curiously enough the Stukas, which I had not seen before, but of which I had heard and read, terrified me far less than I expected. Perhaps I was too interested in what was, to me, a completely new phase of warfare to think of fear and danger. The sirens, of course, were only to batter down one's nerves.

Stetson and I had been caught walking up to-

wards the hospital. I wanted to get back and see what had happened at the camp, to learn how many casualties we had suffered. The dust and smoke filled my eyes and nearly blinded me, but under the excellent camouflage which they offered I ran as hard as I could down the road towards camp. "Get off the road," a French soldier yelled after me. "Do you want to get us all killed?" "You fool," I shouted back over my shoulder without slowing up. "Not even the Heinies can see through this stuff."

Another miracle, or the act of our private guardian angel! Bombs had fallen on every side of the camp, but none on the camp itself, and machine-gun bullets had spattered about like hail on a tin roof, yet neither a car nor a man had been touched.

As soon as the dust and smoke were blown off by the fresh breeze two observation planes passed back and forth to see what damage had been done. They skimmed roof-tops and trees, so low that one was tempted to throw stones at them. Their intermittent strafing was easy to beat by keeping a tree or an ambulance motor in between oneself and the plane. A lone machine-gunner was potting at them from down the road, and his aim was good.



One of them crashed over a near-by hill, sending up a column of black smoke. "Bastard!" I exclaimed to no one in particular. "You'll never bother us again." Death to me meant nothing now, and if it were a German who died I was glad. Hard I had wished to be when I arrived in Beauvais two weeks before, and hard I had become.

After this the Frenchmen at the hospital really hurried, finishing the evacuation quickly. No more wounded came in even after the bombing, as the town was empty, and we were on our way at Major Martene's orders without a second invitation. Certainly we were not sorry to leave what had been our temporary home. Nazi motorized troops usually moved in after a bombing of this sort. It was a kind of mopping-up operation before an advance, and a very effective one.

Yet, I repeat, the dive bombing of the Stukas was far less terrifying, in my opinion, than the rain of death and destruction let loose by the giant bombers flying along so calmly five miles above and beyond the range of anti-aircraft guns. The Stukas at least gave you a thrill for your money, and it was all so fast and over so quickly. Then, too, you can yell satisfying curses at something

that is not very far away. But the scream, prolonged and agonizing, of hundreds of bombs coming down from such a height is the most horrible sensation I know. All you can do is lie flat on the ground and hope that none of them has your initials marked on it. There is not even any satisfaction in cursing at such a distance.

Subsequently I read a newspaper report in which it was stated that the Germans often wasted bombs on objectives that had already been completely destroyed, and amongst other towns Beauvais was cited as an example. I can readily believe this.

Corbeil-Cerf was peaceful after Beauvais, and I enjoyed a room for the second time since leaving Paris. Harold Willis had reserved it for me. We were billeted in a fine old château, or to be more exact, the Section was in the stables—as usual. I think we would have felt uncomfortable, perhaps even unhappy, in anything more pompous. My room, of which I was very proud because it actually had four walls, a floor, a door and a window that opened and closed, comforts to which I was no longer accustomed, had evidently been the domicile of one of the grooms or stable-boys in happier times. There was also an electric light that

worked, and good cold running water down the steps just outside. We had never known the luxury of electricity in Beauvais, and for several days before we left the water-mains which supplied us had been cut by bombs.

Somehow or other the gods were with us, and let us sleep until five the next morning, when a couple of bombs dropped in a field close by and nearly shook me out of bed. Yes, I was sleeping in a real bed. The ancient building quivered noticeably, but held its own against the force of the explosion.

The Major decided that this was no place to keep his wounded. The Boche had sighted activity in the woods around the château and would soon begin to hammer at it in earnest. "A convoy of ten cars to leave at once for the Foch Hospital near Paris, Lieutenant Muir," he ordered. "Yes, sir. Immediately." I liked Martene's abrupt, military manner. There was never any doubt in my mind as to what he wanted when he gave an order. He was rough, coarse of speech, hard-boiled, bad tempered, and beloved by all who came in contact with him. His officers and soldiers would have gone through fire for him, and I think this also applied to the

members of Section One. His exterior was not pleasing. He was short, fat, bumpy-faced, and never very clean. But inside he possessed qualities that men liked — honesty, justice, and unlimited courage. He inspired confidence.

Two hours after the ten cars had left, the Section was ordered to retreat, this time to Bouffemont, across the Oise River. The Germans must be coming fast. From now on my work became more and more difficult. How to keep liaison with the men and cars was a constant problem. We would arrive at one point, ambulances would be dispatched on different details and in different directions, and before their return the base would be removed. There was only one solution. Some one must stay behind until all the drivers had come in to direct them to the new base. This job naturally fell to the Section Leader. At Corbeil-Cerf I chose to wait alone. There was no use risking two people where one was quite sufficient. I was proud that every man came individually and volunteered to remain with me, some of them even insisting, and I admit that I felt damn lonely when they had gone.

However, the peasant family next door was still there, which cheered me some. I went over to talk

with them and found that they also were preparing to leave. The father of the family asked me to come in and drink a glass of cider with him. "Just as well not leave it for the Boche," he said. He had fought for four years against the Germans in the last war and did not want to be captured by them now. The mother, a kindly woman slightly faded, was weeping frankly. She had never left the farm before, and knew no other world. It was everything they owned. Now they would have to leave their well-cultivated fields and glossy cows and chickens. What else could they do? The enemy was coming. I suggested that the Germans might not harm them, and that they would be better off at home than on the highroad. A picture of the endless stream of miserable refugees between Beauvais and Amiens flashed before my eyes, and I compared it to this prosperous farm. Certainly, in their places, I should have preferred the risk and stayed at home. But they would not listen to my arguments. The Germans had put the fear of God in them and they must go. As we argued two little girls and a boy came into the room and stared at us, wide-eyed and bewildered. Perhaps it was on account of the children that they were leaving. I

finished my glass of cider, wished them luck, and returned to the woods by the stable, leaving them to their feverish preparations.

Off to the south I could see planes circling in combat. They were too far away for me even to hear the machine guns, and I could not tell whether it was friend or enemy that came hurtling to earth from a great height, leaving behind a streak of flame like a shooting star.

I opened a can of sardines, drew the cork from a bottle of red wine, cut myself a slice of army bread, and settled down to eat and drink. From where I sat, alone under the trees, the main road was out of sight, and from time to time I went and had a look to assure myself that the trucks and tanks that I heard constantly rumbling along were the retreating French Army and not the Germans.

Meanwhile, the peasants had left and I was alone with the woods and château, with only the cows and chickens and my thoughts for company. I wondered who would feed and care for these poor dumb animals from now on.

Several times French soldiers came into the woods. Once they brought a comrade who had been hurt in a truck accident. It had overturned

and he had been lucky to escape with his life. I dressed his wounds as best I could, washing them with iodine and bandaging them. A stiff drink of rum helped, and he thanked me very much. Then two very badly wounded men were brought in. Word seemed to have gotten about that a hospital unit was there. I was the unit, and knew practically nothing about medicine. These men had been wounded in their tank by Poles, fighting with the French Army, who had mistaken them for Germans. One was practically dead and the other was crying hysterically. The idea of having been shot by his own allies seemed more than his nerves could stand, and he kept repeating that he had waved a white handkerchief, but that they had fired anyway. I did what I could to ease their pains, which was little enough.

The afternoon dragged along ever so slowly. My watch did not seem to advance at all. A few birds piped muted notes in the woods about me, and the occasional drone of motors in the sky mingled with the deep rumblings on the road below as motorized units of the French Army went by in the greatest, most disastrous retreat of history.

To change the monotony I walked down the

road. A Moroccan regiment was resting there and I spoke to a captain, one of their French officers. He was a regular of the colonial infantry, thin-faced, blue-eyed, hard, and intelligent. At first he was suspicious of me, and there was a wary expression in those cold blue eyes that had seen strange things in distant lands. In them I could read unasked questions about myself—what was I doing here alone, in a uniform that was neither French nor English, but rather a combination of both? Perhaps it was my decorations from World War One that reassured him, or the explanation I gave of my presence. Anyway, his stiff reserve finally softened and we talked as friends.

“Are your men demoralized?” I asked. Not at all. Of course they did not like retreating, were not used to it. Naturally they would turn around and go back to the attack if he called on them to do so. They asked nothing better. They had had scarcely anything to eat for four days now, and ammunition was low, but that did not matter. All they asked was to fight in defense of France. Morale was excellent, but orders were to retreat, and orders must be followed. They would hold on the other side of the Oise. The Boche must never



get to Paris. His regiment would die first. I imagine my friend, the Capitaine, is buried with his men in a modest little cemetery, the graves marked with plain wooden crosses, somewhere on the south bank of the River Oise. There is no doubt in my mind that he kept his word.

I gave the Capitaine what was left of my rations, hoping that he would eat. He called a junior officer and ordered it turned over to the mess. From the corner of my eye, when he thought I was not looking, I saw him take up a notch in his belt. Then and there I realized that it was not the front that had failed, it was the rear. Without food and ammunition the bravest men in the world cannot hold off a strong enemy, and it is still my belief that the French soldier of the line has yet to meet his superior in sheer bravery. I saluted the column as it filed off, and returned to my solitary retreat in the woods.

The first drivers to arrive back came in at about two-thirty. I instructed them as to where they should go, and told them to turn any of the other eight cars they might meet on the way. But I also asked them to get word up to me when every one was in. Otherwise it was impossible for me to

know, and I had not the least desire to remain where I was any longer than absolute necessity required. The fast-moving German columns could not be very far away now.

Five o'clock showed on my watch. This was the hour I had set for myself to leave. And still there were the eight cars unaccounted for. The movement on the road was noticeably thinning, and the units coming by now were the ones which I knew were the last to retreat—tanks, motorized light artillery and machine-guns on motorcycles.

At a quarter past, an ambulance drove into the courtyard and pulled up in a literal cloud of dust. Hutchinson, his face wreathed in smiles as always, jumped out. "Hello, Pete," he greeted. "Had a helluva time getting back. The Frenchies said the place had been taken and did not want to let me pass." He chuckled. "I just said 'no compris French' and buzzed on by. All the cars are at Bouffemont. Let's get going." I named over the drivers that were out. "Well," he admitted, "I can't swear about Charlie Curtis. I'm sure I saw him, but I can't swear to it." We decided to wait until six, just to be sure that Charlie did not return to Corbeil-Cerf. We laughed, talked, killed the bottle of

wine I had opened at lunch, and completely forgot about the damned Germans. Hutch has a contagious good humor, and although I am nineteen years his senior I never feel downhearted in his company.

No sign of Curtis at six, so we started off. Hutch led in his ambulance and I followed in the staff car. He took me along at such a clip that I had a hard time keeping up. When the roads were crowded with troops and refugees we drove over sidewalks and through fields. If there was a traffic jam I got out and with my whistle made way for the ambulance, which I explained was full of very seriously wounded. Only once did we get badly stuck and that was before Pontoise, where the last unblocked bridge across the Oise was located. German planes were bombing it and the traffic refused to budge, whistle and shout as I might. The planes missed the bridge, however, and we were soon across.

At Bouffemont we found Jimmy Worden and Burton waiting. They had been left there to tell us that the Section had moved farther on to Montmorency. This news took away my breath. Montmorency was practically a suburb of Paris, and I

was beginning to learn that where we went the enemy was not far behind. Worden's statement that Curtis and all the other drivers were in reassured me, and that night we had a gala dinner in a restaurant to celebrate a reunion which in the morning no one had felt sure would ever take place. Both James and Fuller had tried to reach me, and had been turned back.

## CHAPTER XI

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### ALL'S FAIR IN WAR

THE excellent weather that had favored the Nazis throughout their campaign continued almost without a break. Skies remained blue and ceilings high for the raiding aviators. Due to the lack of rain rivers were unusually low and it was easy to ford them or throw pontoon bridges across when necessary. Never during the years that I have lived in France have I seen the last part of May and the beginning of June so dry and perfect. Day by day my dislike for brilliant sunshine grew until I positively hated it. Rain, rain—if only we could have more of it. Cloudbursts were what I prayed for, and my prayers went unanswered. The Boches were having all the luck.

Except for being completely blacked out, Montmorency and Enghien, touching one another, were calm when we arrived and life was going on about as usual. Shops were open to a brisk business and

one could get an excellent meal in any of the dozens of small restaurants. There were even the usual quota of rowboats floating peacefully about on the smooth surface of the lake, and old men fished tranquilly, catching nothing. It was very warm and terrace cafés along the streets were crowded with thirsty customers. Not many refugees passed this way, and I suppose that explained the lack of nervousness.

There was not much work the day following our arrival in Montmorency. Evidently the Germans were preparing their attack on the Oise River. There was little doubt in my mind that the French would throw everything they had in here and hold on the Oise and the Seine. These rivers form the natural defense of Paris, and when they are crossed the capital is apt to fall.

Part of the Section was quartered in an empty villa, the rest in a lovely garden of roses in full bloom. Again I had a room, but there was no bed and I slept on a stretcher. I laughed to myself for even having thought of a bed. Was I spoiled by my night in Corbeil-Cerf? Was I going soft again so quickly? From my window I could see the Eiffel

Tower. Paris! Only seven miles away, and Josette was there. The telephone was still working and I spoke to her. She and Claude were leaving in the morning for Touraine. They were going by car, but could not obtain enough gasoline for love or money. Paris was nearly empty and the remaining civilian population had been advised to leave. Where was I? Impossible to say over the phone, but I would be at her house within the hour.

Hastily I threw some tins of gasoline in the back of my car and set out, asking Willis to take charge of the Section. Had there been work I would not have done this, but as there was none I was determined not to let my friends down when they needed me. After all, I had been slaving day and night for strangers, so now to give aid to friends seemed only natural and correct. At least that was my interpretation of what I should do under the circumstances, and, right or wrong, I frankly did not give a damn. Josette needed me and I went to her.

I found her calm, but in a depressed state of mind. She admitted openly that which I was trying to hide, even to myself, under a flimsy covering

of vain hopes. She told me that it was going very badly with the French Army and, although I refused to agree, I knew she was right.

We dined together, and though the food and wine were excellent, there was not that usual charming gaiety we had enjoyed during so many of our little dinners at the Escargot d'Or, the Crillon Grill, and many other Paris restaurants. It was replaced by a melancholy intimacy, born of the common knowledge that France would fall.

The change in Paris since my last trip was tremendous. All happiness was gone from its people, and every face was marked deeply with anxiety. The Ville Lumière was face to face with tragedy, and knew it. No taxis were in the streets, as they had all been requisitioned to transport reserves up to the front, and the only cars one saw, moving slowly through the darkened streets, were loaded with baggage and fleeing people. There were few people about, and the young couples strolling with their arms about each other, so familiar to the Parisian scene, were absent. The last reservists had been called to the colors.

Claude was at home when we arrived, and I noted in a moment that her usual effervescent



charm was gone. She was in a state of high nervous tension that was hard to keep under control. Her husband, an officer in the Maginot Line, had not written for a week. This had never happened before. The news that she would have enough gasoline to reach her mother's home near Tours calmed her only for a moment. Then she went off into such a torrent of hysterical speech that I was afraid to leave Josette alone with her.

Most of the night was spent trying to comfort Claude, and it was three o'clock when exhaustion quieted her and we were able to put her to bed. We had just gotten her under the covers, and were congratulating ourselves, when the air-raid sirens began to shriek full blast. My advice was against going down into the cellar, so the three of us went out onto the terrace to listen for planes. Neither the moon nor stars were visible, and the night air was close and stuffy. There was a strong odor of smoke, yet there was no glow in the sky to indicate a fire. Far off in the direction of Le Bourget, the airport, we heard the sound of motors, but the planes did not come near us. Paris had been declared an open city and I did not think that the Germans would attack it. There were a few dull

detonations as bombs crashed in the distance, and a dull rumbling told us that the defense guns were at work.

When the "all clear" signal blew, a curious, eerie dawn was breaking. Already in the street below early birds were filling their cars with luggage and leaving. Five A.M. I noted on my watch. Time to start moving. I intended to return to the Section as soon as possible, feeling that during the day there would be activity. First I must go down to the Crillon Hotel and pay for the room I had taken and not used. Then I would come back, say good-by and be off.

The pall that hung over Paris was so strange that I cannot describe it. The light was only a half-light, obscuring objects a short distance away or giving them an unreal, ghostlike appearance without dimensions. Sounds were muffled, and a heavy blanket of acrid-smelling smoke covered everything, making people cough constantly. It was difficult to breathe and your handkerchief was black if you used it. My first thought was that the French had thrown some sort of smoke screen over Paris to hide it from the enemy. Later I learned that it came from Rouen, some hundred-odd miles away.

The Allies had set fire to 120,000,000 francs' worth of gasoline stored there to prevent the Germans from seizing it.

Only the passing of an occasional refugee car broke the silence of the streets as I crept along, unable to make speed on account of the thickness of the smoke. I stopped for a moment in front of the Crillon to look out over the beautiful Place de la Concorde. The Chamber of Deputies, across the Seine, was obscured completely, as were Marly's Horses at the foot of the Champs-Élysées. The Obelisk, its base protected against bombs by rows upon rows of sand-bags, stood out vaguely, a part of this unreal world that should be so familiar to me. The female statue representing Strasbourg there to the left caught my attention. She had been twenty-two years out of mourning. I wondered when she would return. (When the city is in German hands the French tie a piece of black crepe on the statue.)

It was not easy saying farewell to Josette. She had meant so much to me, had helped me when I had most been in need of help, and we had been so close in our friendship. Perhaps we were parting for a very long time—Who can tell what queer

pranks the fortunes of war will play on the humble individual? Perhaps. . . . Ah, no! I refuse to accept that it was forever, although I have not seen her since. I refuse to give up the only woman I have ever loved as easily as that. Some day, and not too far in the future, I shall march back into France with a conquering army, that of General de Gaulle I hope, and then I shall find her again, eyes sparkling and white teeth showing in a brilliant smile of welcome. I *know* I shall, and together we will take up the ends of the thread so rudely broken by war and start life again just where we left off, that heartbreaking morning in the Rue du Dobropol.

When I arrived in Montmorency a rumor had spread that Turkey and Russia had declared war against Germany. The effect on the French was extraordinary. It gave them fresh hope. Since the beginning of the war they had received only severe blows, nothing to encourage them. Poland had fallen; Norway, Holland and Denmark were occupied; the Belgian King had invited Allied troops into his country and then capitulated, allowing them to be nearly caught in a trap; the Italians had performed their famous dagger stunt, stabbing France in the back when she was down. Now good

news came at last. Perhaps it was the turning point. We tried in every way to check up and find if this were fact or fancy. The rumor had been widely spread, but in the days to come we learned that it was false, and our hopes were cruelly dashed to the ground and smashed.

Not long after I had returned from Paris, Major Martene sent for me. Half of the ambulances would report immediately to the 16th Division, and the other half to the 13th for service. They were urgently needed. There was severe fighting along the banks of the Oise. This service terminated, the Section was to rejoin him at Houdan, to the west of Paris.

Willis and Lieutenant Couture took ten of the cars and left to find the 13th Division, while I led the other half in search of the 16th. I was given the wrong address. The town where I was told I would find them was deserted except for a company of Algerian infantry and their officers. They had been there only a short time and the officers did not know who had preceded them. The men were throwing up a barricade across the road and placing their machine-guns. They seemed in very high spirits, and were most amused at the sight of

Americans. Their greeting was friendly, and they continued to chat and joke in their native tongue. I asked one of them, who spoke bad but fluent French, the explanation for so much good humor. "We are tired of retreating," he said, "and now we have decided not to retreat any more. That is all." He pointed to the barricade. "Either we stop the enemy, or we die there with our machine-guns hot. We will not be the only ones to die." This evidently struck him as very funny, and he laughed heartily as he adjusted a machine-gun.

After some difficulty the medical corps of the 16th was located at Bouffemont, where we had passed the night before the last, quartered in the sumptuous château of Baron Empain, a very wealthy Belgian who had been reported lost while serving with the French Army.

Immediately on our arrival two cars were ordered to the first-line dressing station near Ile-Adam. Herbert de Belle and McElwain were on call and I went up with them. German artillery was hammering away fairly heavily from the other side of the Oise, and had killed and wounded a few soldiers in the woods. The young Frenchmen did

not seem to know how to take it. They did not understand how easy it was to play safe under this kind of shelling. Instead of scattering, lying flat when they heard a shell coming, or digging in, they stood about in excited groups and talked. They must have been green troops, and showed surprise when a shell took heavy toll instead of possibly wounding one or two men if they had played the game right. The old *poilu* of 1914-18 would have known what to do. This was his kind of war, and it frankly seemed good to me to get back into it after the 1940 type that I had seen at Amiens and Beauvais. I can honestly say that I felt a kind of homesickness for the last war as I dropped time and again on my belly to avoid flying shell fragments. After the terrible bombings we had been through this was child's play, and you could beat it every time if you knew how. It surprised me a good deal that Mac showed signs of nervousness here, and I told him to pull himself together. He said he had a bad hangover, which I knew was not true. I had seen him take bombing after bombing without batting an eye, but this was something he was not accustomed to and it both-

ered him. Later he admitted this, at the same time assuring me most earnestly that he would get used to it very quickly.

There were not as many wounded in the woods as we expected, and Mac was starting back with an empty car when a shell dropped near a group of soldiers who were foolishly standing up, and filled the ambulance.

The Colonel in command asked me to dine at the officers' mess, something I never liked to do as I preferred taking pot-luck with my men, but I could not politely refuse. The meal, served on the Baron's finest porcelain, was sumptuous. Hors d'œuvres from the well-stocked larders, and guinea hen from the farmyard, washed down with wines of the finest vintages, followed by coffee, liqueurs, and champagne. The dining hall was royal in its splendor, and my only regret was that my friends were not with me.

We had just drunk a health in champagne to Franco-American friendship when an orderly entered, clicked his heels, saluted, and presented a dispatch to the Colonel. The young doctor at my right, who evidently appreciated the better things in life and thought very highly of the inner man,



groaned. "It was too good to last," he whispered in my ear. And he was right. The dispatch was an order to retreat immediately.

Here I was again caught with cars out. It would never do to have them return in the night and find me gone. The Colonel agreed that I should wait, and suggested that I should keep an ambulance with me in case any more wounded came in. He also told me to take anything I wanted from the excellent wine cellars, as the enemy would have them soon. This last suggestion which sounded so pleasant was bad news indeed. Either the Germans had already crossed the Oise, or he thought they would very soon. My personal guess was that they had not crossed as yet. I based this on the heavy artillery fire about us, which was entirely French, my theory being that it was concentrated on the bridgeheads on the other side.

Before leaving, the Colonel ordered all the animals, except the dangerous ones, set free so that they could forage for themselves. There was a regular menagerie out back of the stables, and only the bears were left behind bars. It would not do to let them roam about the country as long as it was not certain that all civilians were evacuated.

I tried to adopt a young llama, but the little fellow struggled so fiercely that I was forced to let him go. He bounded off into the darkness and I do not know what happened to him. My luck with a green parrot that I caught in a wire fence was equally bad. I tried to teach him to say, "Go to hell, Hill," the name of my boss in Paris, and his only response was to bite me, so I put him on the branch of a tree, myself saying, "Go to hell, parrot," and let my animal-training instincts stop at that. I did not even go near the bears, fearing a real catastrophe.

Herbert de Belle stayed with me, and the château was a weird and lonesome place with only the two of us left in it. Outside there were the wild animals; inside, the walls were decorated with countless mounted heads. Evidently the Baron was a big-game hunter. In one hall he had a full-grown stuffed giraffe, which stared at us with glassy eyes, and many beautiful skins on the floors. Queer, exotic bird-calls and the sound of continued artillery fire were the only noises that broke the oppressing silence of the place.

With nothing to do but wait patiently, Herb and I decided on a non-conducted tour of the

château. First, however, we brought his ambulance from its hiding place under the trees and left it in the entrance yard, so that any returning drivers would see it and know that we were there. The staff car was under the great outside stairway. With flickering candles we visited the house from roof to cellar, finally pulling up in the latter place to do a little legal pillaging. Military law permits a soldier to carry away what he wants if it is certain that the place is about to fall into enemy hands, and we were more than certain now. In point of fact we were not so confident that we would not fall along with the château. Only the fact that the French artillery kept banging away outside bucked us up and gave us hope.

For several hours we rummaged in the cellars, selecting the finest wines and champagnes from a very choice collection. Once I heard my companion swearing violently and complaining. He had found a bin over which was inscribed the name and year of his favorite Château Yquem, and the bin was empty. He cursed the French soldiers that had been there first, and called them a lot of dirty thieves. When I laughed at this he looked up annoyed. "But, damn it all," he said. "With all the

other stuff here why should they take the best?" We were quite hard on the magnums of Veuve Cliquot, 1923, turning our noses up at a younger Pommery & Greno. And yet after the staff car was loaded down little or no impression had been made on the bins. Evidently the Baron was a wine connoisseur as well as a big-game hunter.

For a while we sat in the huge salon, stared at by the dead eyes of mounted animals, and sipping champagne, until our heads began to nod with sleep. Herb lay down on a moderate-sized divan and I chose one of royal proportions. It must have been fully twelve feet long and six deep, and I wondered what the Baron used it for in ordinary times. With so many fur rugs about it was unnecessary to unroll my blankets. Besides, we might have to leave in a hurry and I did not wish to lose them. So I pulled a zebra skin over my fully clothed body and slept until dawn, which was not long in coming.

When I awoke I was startled by the dead silence. Not a sound, no birds, no artillery, nothing. As long as the cannon were banging away I had felt relatively safe. Now they must have joined the retreat, leaving the river crossing unopposed. I

shook de Belle. "Let's buzz off," I said. "The other cars must have gone on to Houdan, or they'd be back by now, and I don't like this peaceful and quiet countryside." He was on his feet in a second, throwing to the ground the polar bear skin he had chosen as a blanket. "Does smell suspicious, doesn't it?"

In the courtyard we had a shock. The spot where we had left de Belle's ambulance was empty. A few stragglers went by in retreat along the road outside and we tried to learn what regiments had passed between three and five-thirty in the morning. The car had been there at three. I had made a final tour of inspection then and had seen it.

While we stood debating on what was the best plan to follow, a dainty, mouselike, little old lady came in and asked where the French officers who were there the day before had gone. She and her two invalid sisters were waiting up the hill. They had been promised transportation, but the officers must have forgotten. Would I be so kind? Really, they could not stay there alone with the Germans. It was too, too awful. I told her to go back and wait. We would not forget them. This was bad news, because it meant that I must jettison most of

our fine wines to make room for them in the staff car, if we did not succeed in locating the missing ambulance. However, we would do it, of course. The old lady went off smiling.

Perhaps it was our good intentions, even at the cost of our wine, that brought us luck. Two very sheepish-looking young officers of the colonial infantry drove in with the car a moment after our mouselike friend had disappeared around the corner. They had thought the ambulance abandoned, one of them said, and then contradicted himself by admitting that they had had a stroke of guilty conscience and decided to bring the car back when they saw it belonged to the Field Service. They knew of the splendid work we were doing, and asked me to pardon them, which I did, not caring a damn as long as I had the ambulance back. Also this saved the wine.

Herbert was leading with his cargo of old ladies when we arrived at the outskirts of Montmorency. He missed the road and we stopped to back up. Just as I threw my gears into reverse the most terrible explosion I have ever heard went off not a hundred yards behind us. The concussion pressed in against my head until I thought it would be

crushed; my ears rang and I was momentarily deaf. De Belle's car ahead of me shook violently, and debris began falling all about us. Herb looked out from the driver's seat and I signalled full speed ahead. I did not know what had happened, but I did know that this was a good place to leave as fast as possible. There might be other explosions, and had we not passed when we did, this one would surely have finished us.

At Enghien we found the medical staff from Bouffemont installed in the town hall. The Colonel said that none of our cars had reported there, so I felt sure they had gone on to Houdan. He asked us to wait for a load of wounded that we could drop at the Foch Hospital, which was on our route. One of the wounded, he told us, was on the Oise when the Germans took the bridgeheads. He had been saved in a motorcycle sidecar while they were coming across. They had arrived at the bridge disguised as peasant refugees. When they got to the bridgehead they drew guns and shot the guards before there was time to blow up the bridge. Certainly they were not far away now, and Paris would surely fall.

Two badly cut civilians came in while we were

waiting. They had been near the explosion we had heard a few minutes before. It was the gunpowder depot in the old fort that had been set off. At least the Boche would not get it.

The town of Enghien, so peaceful and animated when we arrived from Corbeil-Cerf three days before, was now completely deserted. Cafés where we had enjoyed refreshing drinks were boarded up, as were all the other shops and houses. From a gay little town on the side of a smiling lake, it had been turned almost overnight into a sad, mournful place. The stroke of a sorcerer's wand had done it, and the sorcerer was Adolf Hitler.

The wounded were loaded and once again we took the road.



## CHAPTER XII

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### MORE RETREAT

PARIS by now was almost completely emptied of human beings. No automobiles rolled up and down the great boulevards where once the traffic was so thick that driving was difficult. No taxis, no green autobuses, only now and then a rare touring car hurrying on its way with belated refugees. The municipal police had received orders to stay, and stood at their posts or walked their beats in silence.

De Belle and I lost no time crossing the town, deposited our wounded at the Foch Hospital, and continued on to Houdan. I had figured that we were being sent there to carry the *blessés* of the army that was defending the Seine, but when we arrived we found Quigley waiting with the gasoline truck, and he informed us that the Germans had already crossed the river on pontoon bridges. He had been left to tell us that the Section had gone on to Rambouillet, where we were to join

it. All of the cars that had been with me at Bouffemont were accounted for now that de Belle had come in, but four drivers from the half of the Section that had been with the 13th Division were missing.

I sent de Belle on to join the Section, giving him two magnums of champagne for the boys, with my compliments. Quigley would wait for me at Houdan, unless he received definite word that the Germans were coming. I also left a magnum of champagne with him to keep him company, and returned to Paris, hoping that I might locate one or more of the lost drivers. At least I could leave word at several places where they might pass not to return to Houdan because of the danger, but to go straight to Rambouillet. I did not want Quigley to be captured. Not only was he an excellent man and a good driver, but also he had the gasoline supply, most necessary to keep the Section on a working basis. So I let the car out, covering the seventy-five miles to Paris and back, including two stops to leave instructions, in an hour and a half. This was over crowded roads, for the pedestrian refugees, carrying their possessions in their hands

and on their backs, had not travelled far from the capital.

None of the four drivers had been seen either by the guardian at our office in the Champs-Élysées or by courageous little Albertson, who was sticking it out with his family in United States House at the Cité Universitaire where we had lived before going to the front. After leaving messages at both places I headed full tilt for Houdan. As I passed through the Bois de Boulogne I noticed clouds of smoke beginning to rise in the northwest not far distant. Soon the smoke would black out the sun and spread over Paris. I made a hurried stop to ask a policeman what it was, and he told me that soldiers had set fire to the gasoline depots in Neuilly. This is a suburb, really a part of the capital, so I knew they must be expecting the Germans at any moment. They marched into the city at break of day next morning.

At least a hundred times on my return to Houdan soldiers and civilians tried to stop me for a ride, but I did not slow down my pace. Quigley's safety and that of my Section depended on my arriving in Houdan before the Germans, and this

was the all-important question from my point of view. Each officer should hold himself responsible for the safety of his men, and that should come first. If we lost the precious gasoline the Section risked being stuck and captured. From now on gasoline became a major problem in our lives. It was as important to us as our very lifeblood.

Quigley was still there, his broad face calm and unconcerned, although he had been bombed once during my absence. However, there was not much left in the champagne bottle I had left with him. Two British tank corps men had joined him. Their tank had broken down as the Germans approached, and they had kept to the fields, watching the enemy roll along the roads. In the night they had stolen a boat and traversed the Seine under a cross-fire from the Germans and the French. Now they were in Houdan and did not know what to do next. They spoke no French and had no funds, so Karl Quigley took them under his care.

I was in a house occupied by French military police, studying the map to find the shortest route for Rambouillet, when Karl rushed in, white and breathless, shouting, "Here they come down the road." He kept on going through the house, fol-

lowed closely by his newly adopted Englishmen. Naturally I supposed that we were trapped by at least a Panzer regiment, and was about to follow when my curiosity got the best of me and I ran to the front door for a quick look. Three planes were flying low, actually following the road, and I could see by their markings that they were English. This relieved my mind so much that when I finally persuaded Quigley to return I forgot to give him hell.

We found the shortest road on the map and were about to leave when a woman came up to me. She was a refugee from Paris, and her four-year-old daughter was waiting for her on a near-by farm. Would we take them with us? Anywhere, just to get away from the Boche. "Oh, please, Monsieur. For my little girl's sake." And so I inherited a refugee mother, daughter, and the family cat. Ordinarily I was against this sort of thing. It hampered the efficiency of our work, but I could not leave her here in this deserted town, which would be taken at any moment. Even the military police were closing up shop and leaving. The woman in her terror forgot where she had left the child, and we were some time locating it. Her

baggage filled up the back of the car entirely; so the three of us, plus cat, sat in front. I asked how she had come so far from Paris with all this luggage, and she told me that they had travelled with peasants in an open wagon, but the horse had gone lame and the peasants were remaining on a farm near Houdan. And so, with my happy little family, plus the two Englishmen, we headed for Rambouillet.

Some distance away from Rambouillet we could see and hear that the town where the Presidents of France had their summer home was under a violent bombing, and I signalled Quigley to slow down. The planes were plainly seen circling around, and the sound of frequent explosions reached our ears. We were still well outside when we came upon a truck burning on the roadside, and from it came loud reports like shellfire. It was an ammunition truck upon which an aviator had made a direct hit. Keeping on the far side of a tree I approached it on foot and could see the driver and his assistant, carbonized beyond recognition, sitting upright in the seat.

It would have been foolish to risk passing this truck with our load of gasoline as long as it kept

pot-shotting on all sides, and besides the Germans were still bombing the town, often passing out where we were. The forest, which came down to the road, made as good cover as any; so we stopped there, driving the cars into a sheltered lane. I ordered my friends to keep at a safe distance from the gas truck in case it was hit. From my own point of view I am happier in a forest during a raid than any other place. You are hidden from above, there is not the danger of falling walls, and while you may be killed or wounded there is not that horrible risk, the most terrible of all in my mind, of being buried alive in a cellar. During my month of war, in which I was on the receiving end of about everything the Germans had to offer, I was in a bomb shelter once, and this was the worst moment I passed, although the planes dropped nothing, because I did not know what was going on outside and feared being buried.

From the depths of the forest, puffing and sweating, arrived a fat, red-faced figure in the uniform of a French soldier, and I recognized Lieutenant Couture's chauffeur. In one breath he was calling on the saints to save him, in the next he was cursing the Lieutenant for having left him in such a

dreadful place alone. "*Bonne mère de Dieu!* Good mother of God!—Dirty pig of a lieutenant to leave me here. *Merde, alors!*" I laughed at his unbounded fear, and he turned on me more furious than ever. But he was a coward, the rare type of Frenchman that I did not like, and he was easily made to remember his place.

Couture had left the fellow there to tell us to wait. He had gone to see some general and had been away for hours. The chauffeur, Klein, thought we had better go and look for him. But it was not the Lieutenant's safety that was on his mind, it was his own. He did not like the forest. The whereabouts of the Section were unknown to him.

When the planes had gone away and I thought we could safely pass the burning truck, I asked every one except Quigley to walk to the far side of it where we would pick them up. Once in the town, which had received a terrific beating and was filled with troops and half-crazed refugees, Klein decided that leaving the forest had been a mistake and that we should return. He stopped me to say this at the most dangerous spot possible, in the middle of important crossroads where troops



were passing. I am neither more courageous nor more cowardly than another, but I avoid places where I am likely to be killed whenever possible, and the planes might be back at any moment; so I told him to keep moving. He said we ought to go back to the forest. I said he could do what he damned well pleased, but that we were going on to look for the Section. He did go back, and I never saw him again. Couture left Rambouillet without returning for his chauffeur. My private opinion was that they were two of a kind, and my dislike for both would have been intense except for the fact that neither of them interested me.

Rarely, if ever, have I seen chaos as complete and wild as in the town of Rambouillet. Several roads over which refugees were travelling converged there, and there was an important military movement. Add to this the confusion created by the bombing. The traffic jam was beyond control, even had there been some one there to control it. Two hundred yards an hour was good time, made yard by yard. The English Tommys worked hard to clear the way, but their task was hopeless. People were frantic and nerves were at breaking point. It was impossible to get ambulances

through to pick up the wounded. The scenes of anguish and suffering that I saw and was unable to cope with were indeed heartbreaking. I could not leave the steering wheel for a moment, as I had to continue to hold my place in this slow-moving line of miserable humanity. If I pulled off on a side road to give succor, I would not be able to get back on the main road again. And then I must follow Quigley and find the Section, must keep directly behind him. What a perfect target for Nazi planes these crowded roads made! I was surprised that more did not come over. They could have reaped a rich harvest.

We got through town and found the roads outside just as bad. There were four lanes of traffic, two going each way, where at best there was only space for three lanes. I saw an officer on the running board of a car that was slowly coming towards us. The squat, badly built figure was familiar, and although his back was turned I had no trouble recognizing Lieutenant Couture. He seemed very glad to see us, and I found out why. It was not because he liked us any more than we liked him, but he had wrecked his car for the second time and wanted the truck to tow him. We spent most of

our time getting him out of trouble, and instead of helping he invariably managed to hinder us in everything. This was certainly neither the time nor the place for an accident, and to save my life I did not see how he could have speeded up sufficiently to wreck anything in such traffic. But for that sort of stunt Couture would always find a way. It was his second major accident in two weeks—twice as many as we had had with our twenty-three cars in the same length of time. He was a past-master at being a damn nuisance.

However, he wrote the whereabouts of the Section on a slip of paper for me. They had not stayed here, but had immediately moved on another thirty or forty miles. The fact that this meant that de Belle was lost did not disturb me. He could handle the situation, I knew, and would find us in time. Besides, every one of the drivers had been informed that the headquarters office from Paris was now at Vouvray, and to go there if lost.

We came to a small road which turned off to the south. When the truck had passed, Couture told me that this was the road to take if I wanted to reach the Section. I pulled the car into it and yelled for Quigley to back up and follow me. Too

late. A huge armored car had slipped into my place behind Karl and we were definitely separated. The Lieutenant's car was on the main road and he wanted Quigley with him to pull it out. I could have strangled him with joy in my heart for this trick, and probably would have, except that I was carried along in the line of traffic against my will.

And worst of all, the road was not at all the right one. It circled around and headed back towards Rambouillet. I did not wish to return to the town, for I was sure that if the planes came back there would be a dangerous panic. I could take care of myself, but now there was the added responsibility of my newly acquired family to consider. The gasoline in my tank was getting low with all this slow running, mostly in first speed, and I had not filled it, thinking to remain with Quigley and his supply. There was enough left to get us to the Section provided I did not miss the way and take a long route. And night was coming on fast.

At this point I had a break of luck. A lane, hardly more than a footpath, led into a field on the right. The ground looked hard and I took it. Here

at least I would be away from the madness of the road, and could think, study my maps, and examine the situation, which was not brilliant.

First I cut a quantity of branches and camouflaged the car. Then I studied my detailed map of this sector. It would not be difficult to reach the road I wanted if the car could pass through the lane. I walked down it to see if this were possible, and found it blocked with other motorists who were installed there in a small woods for the night. One of them said that they would be leaving at crack of dawn, which suited me, as I did not care to drive at night with so little gasoline in my tank. I would start at that time too, and with luck reach the Section between six and seven o'clock.

My refugee companion had some dry toast and a bar of chocolate, to which I added a bottle of Baron Empain's very finest claret, and we dined in the field as darkness fell. A heavy fog came up, for which I was thankful, and then turned into a light, cold drizzle. I walked up and down the lane, smoking and trying to make heads or tails of life. It just did not seem to add up. There were certainly ten million people, not counting soldiers, on the road that night, and most of them not as lucky as we

were. This woman who was with me, and who had left a comfortable apartment in Paris, now counted herself fortunate to have eaten dry toast and chocolate, to have had a swallow of wine from the bottle, and to be able to allow her child and cat to sleep in her lap while she dozed fitfully sitting upright on the front seat of my car. Topsy-turvy world was the only description that a fatigued, bewildered brain would invent for me. The cold rain penetrated beneath my tunic, and I climbed into the car behind the steering wheel, and joined my two companions and cat, to pass the remaining hours of the night on the front seat.

## CHAPTER XIII

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### PÉTAIN ASKS PEACE TERMS

THE traffic had cleared up somewhat during the night, and I was able to make fair speed along the main highway, coasting downhill whenever I could to conserve gasoline. It was good to be away from the milling, half-crazed mobs of Rambouillet, even though Nazi planes did fly over us several times, strafing with machine-guns, forcing us to stop the car and run for shelter. My companion and her little daughter behaved magnificently under these dangerous and trying conditions, obeying my instructions like soldiers. The child was too young to understand what was happening, and the mother, while thoroughly frightened, managed to hold her chin up and keep smiling. I was very glad that I had not left them at Houdan.

About twenty-five miles from Rambouillet we left the highway and turned off on a charming little country road that was not cluttered with

refugees, and ran through a verdant and happy valley. Nor was this road bombed. One could almost forget about the war and all its horrors here. I breathed a sigh of relief, too, when I saw the name of the village I was looking for marked on a signpost, and noted by the gauge that I had twice as much gasoline as was necessary to reach it. Now, if the Section had not received new orders and moved off in the night, we were all right. On we rolled, stopping once or twice to ask villagers if they had seen American ambulances pass that way. No one had, which worried me. This was the road to the village Couture had written down, but instructions were countermanded so often and so rapidly that one could never be sure.

But the Section was there, the cars lined up under a row of trees along the banks of a mill-pond, and the men still sleeping in them. Only Stetson was up, and I found him washing in a basin of steaming water that a farmer's wife had heated for him. He took us to a modest café where coffee, bread and butter tasted like a meal prepared for royalty, and told me what had been happening during my absence. As I knew, the Section had gone to Houdan, then Rambouillet. At both these places



they had stopped for only a very short time before receiving orders to proceed. They had arrived here the previous night and could not be better off. It was away from everything, no bombing, very kind people and plenty of food. This sounded promising, for we needed rest badly. They had hauled practically no wounded since coming south of Paris, and had had a tough time getting through the traffic jams. Three or four bombings without a casualty. We checked the ambulances against my list. There were still five missing, plus Quigley and the French Lieutenant. "Hope that damn Frog never shows up," Stet said, voicing my opinion. But he did, unfortunately, shortly afterwards, with the radiator protector and headlights of his car smashed in, and without the gasoline truck. He told me that Quigley had left him on the side of the road to shift for himself, and must be punished most severely. I made a mental note to "punish" him with another magnum of Veuve Cliquot as soon as he came back. He had done his best to lose Couture, and if he had failed it was not his fault.

When I finished coffee I went out to see who was awake, and found most of the men washing and dressing. They had had a good night's sleep

and were in excellent spirits. Willis was in the next village, about a mile away, with Martene, so I hurried over to make a report to the Major and say hello to Harold. The latter had a little house for us, and there was a room for my family, which became quite a joke, and I was accused of certain selfish interests which I certainly did not have.

During the day Bartlett, one of the missing drivers, got word to us that he was stuck without gasoline some twenty miles away, and I dispatched an ambulance to bring him in. Quigley and four cars were still on the absent list. The gasoline question as yet was not serious, for each ambulance carried a fairly large reserve supply, but I would have felt happier had Quigley been there, and he would have been if the fool Lieutenant had not dragged him away from me the night before. Damn the fellow's eyes. He really was bad news. Martene could not stand him any more than we could, and on one occasion threatened to have him locked up for eight days. That afternoon he ran into the Major's car and I thought the little fellow, of whom I was so fond, would explode with fury. The vocabulary with which he told Couture what he thought of him was a masterpiece of unrepeatable profanity

that must have taken him all of his eleven years in the Foreign Legion to perfect. From the bottom of my heart I admired his command of French curse words.

Harold Willis suggested a gala dinner in the local *bistrot*, and I agreed with enthusiasm, adding that Baron Empain, whom we had not had the pleasure of meeting, would supply his choicest wines and champagnes. Willis went to the restaurant to order the dinner, something very special, and I put five magnums of Cliquot's best in the coldest water I could find. We would have a bang-up celebration in our quiet valley.

During the afternoon the first refugees began filing through, then more and more, and I could see the nervous reaction of the local inhabitants. Finally some of their friends from up the valley passed, adding to the excitement. There were wild rumors circulating that the Boches were coming, and when the town crier, a weather-beaten, mothly old fellow with a drum, came out in the public square and announced that *Monsieur le Maire* was leaving and advised his townspeople to do the same, the sequence that I was now becoming accustomed to happened. It seemed to follow us right along. A

happy, normal place where life went on as usual, the arrival of Section One, a few hours of rest and comfort, refugees, rumors, a deserted town. I was getting a little sensitive about it, feeling that we were the carriers of ill fortune. Needless to say, we really had nothing to do with these evacuations. They happened because we were always just one jump ahead of the enemy, and were taking place in thousands of similar towns and villages that did not know of our existence.

We ate our gala dinner sitting on the ground outside the restaurant, which was closed, the family who ran it having been one of the first to get away. And it was not much of a celebration, for we, too, had received our marching orders for eight o'clock that night. Retreat—retreat—retreat—retreat! God! How I began to hate that word. It was getting on my nerves, under my skin.

It seemed to me that a good idea would be to make contact with our headquarters at Vouvray, learn what they were doing, and at the same time give them news of the Section. I mentioned this thought to Willis and he agreed with me. He would take the Section on to its next post, and I would remain where I was, leaving before dawn for

Vouvray. In that way I could tell any of the lost drivers, if by chance they came during the night, where to go. This waiting in deserted spots was becoming a second nature with me by now. I would rejoin the Section immediately after I had reported to my boss, Lovering Hill.

That night my refugees and I were the lone survivors in the village. Several inhabitants had come to me early in the evening to ask my advice about leaving. I had advised them to stay, which was not what they wanted me to say, so they had promptly left. Hundreds of motorcycles went through in perfect formation, one after the other, and this raised faint hopes in me that an orderly retreat was in progress, and that the French intended to put up a desperate defense on the far side of the Loire River. This was the country's last natural line of fortifications. After that the way through to the Mediterranean was clear.

Although I left at four o'clock next morning I never got to Vouvray. My refugee mother wanted to be put out in a little town near Chartres. She had friends there, and her son, a boy of seventeen, had promised to meet her at the friends' home. It was some distance out of my way, but she was

becoming a problem and slowing up my work, so I was glad to do as she asked in order to be free. Not that she was not the most courageous and considerate of women. It was just that I felt I could travel faster and do my job better alone.

Her friends' home was closed tightly. They had gone, and the son was not there either. The poor woman was desperate. How would she ever find her boy again? This had been agreed upon on leaving Paris as the spot where they would meet. Hundreds of thousands of families were broken up and separated this way, and I am sure that there are still many who have not yet been reunited. What could she do? Where could she go? I did not know, but I could not carry her with me for the rest of the war. I had a very definite duty to perform. She understood this. Would I take her to the station? A refugee train was about to pull out for the South. With the help of several men who were there, I put the mother, child, cat and baggage aboard and waved good-by, wondering what the answer to it all could be.

My intention was to keep to the back roads as much as possible, hoping to avoid traffic. It was already near noon and the sun was directly over

my head. In view of the fact that these byways were not marked, and that I could not be guided in my direction by the sun, I resorted to a compass Harold Willis had thoughtfully given me. It had really been meant to serve in case of escape from capture, for travelling by foot at night, but here it served me well. The small roads were even worse than the highways, and I set my course almost due south, in time hitting the main road for Orléans.

On this great artery of refugee traffic I saw real misery. Food and money were beginning to give out for those who were afoot, on bicycles, or in horse-drawn vehicles. Most of the motorists had long since run short of gasoline. Some of these cars were being towed behind the carts of kindly peasants, often three and four in tandem if there were strong horses to pull. And cars with fuel were pulling their more unfortunate fellow motorists who were without. All along the road, averaging at least one to every twenty-five yards, were smashed-up and abandoned cars, some brand new, but for the most part of ancient vintage. It was a tragic sight, this roadside graveyard, and I have heard from good authority that as many people

lost their lives in accidents during the war as there were French soldiers killed in battle. How true this is I cannot say, but the number of broken-up cars one saw everywhere, some from bombs, though mostly from accidents, was unbelievable. Billions of francs' worth of motor cars must have been destroyed in France alone.

Judging from the movement on the road all of northern France was trying desperately to get across the Loire. Somehow they seemed to think that the miracle would happen there, that the army would hold. It was almost as slow and difficult to advance along this highway, wide though it was, as it had been in the center of Rambouillet after the bombing. I figured that if I could cross the Loire, although Vouvray was on this side, I would be able to make better time. Before arriving in Orléans I turned to the right and headed for a bridge farther down the river. My first reason for not wishing to cross by the Orléans bridge was because I knew that the town was under continual bombardment, and my second was that experience had taught me to avoid towns whenever possible, as traffic is at its worst in them.

It was well on into the afternoon when I finally



reached the far side of the Loire, having spent twenty very long minutes stuck on the middle of the bridge watching German bombers in the distance dropping their tons of destruction on Orléans, and thinking that any moment they might come over us. Bridges were not amusing spots to be stuck on.

The south shore of the river was just as congested as the north. However, I plugged on mile after mile at snail's speed. This continual stopping and starting and running in low gear was eating away at my fuel supply and I again began to wonder if I would reach my destination before nightfall, or if I would reach it at all. There had been talk of blowing the bridges, and I would have to cross back to get to Vouvray.

Two French ambulances passed, going in my direction. I noticed that the traffic cleared for them whereas it would not budge for my staff car, so I followed close behind the second one, blowing my klaxon loudly as though I was with them. This worked for some miles until they turned off into the grounds of a military hospital.

In several towns I saw pumps where the military authorities were giving out gasoline, but as hun-

dreds of people were standing in line before these pumps I did not stop. This same situation existed in front of the rare bread-shops that were open for business. People must have waited hours for a single loaf, and although I had had no food since the night before I continued on my way. The lack of food and sleep did not bother me, and I never knew fatigue. Three weeks earlier I could not have done this. I was soft then, but the war had changed all that.

Nevertheless, tough or not tough, I felt pretty happy when I turned a corner in a town that was still smouldering from a bombing, and ran head-on almost directly into one of our cars. James and Morgan were in it. Morgan jumped out and came over to me, while James held his place in the traffic lane. The Section had again moved. In fact I was within five miles of it. They had been to Vouvray, and headquarters was breaking up to retreat across the Loire. There was no need for me to continue, and I had calculated that my gasoline supply was too low to get me there anyway, so I followed James and Morgan to the Section's encampment.

This was just one of the many strokes of fortune that kept the Section together during these days

of constant retreating. Had I followed the more important road down the northern bank of the river I would probably have found neither the Section nor headquarters. Our good luck was phenomenal, unbelievable, and stayed with us until the very end. Within a few hours the four ambulances that were missing turned up, along with Quigley and the truck, at the tiny, half-lost village where we were quartered. Some one had run into some one, who had heard. . . . Three of the cars found us by such devious means. Herb de Belle had managed to get a phone call through to Vouvray, and was on his way, nearly out of gasoline, when he came across Quigley going through Orléans with a truckful. That night, when we were reunited by nothing short of miracles, we drank a health to Lady Luck with Baron Empain's last magnums of champagne.

The following morning, very early, Major Martene called for four cars to report to a division some distance north of the Loire. I did not like this very much, and took the cars over myself. Jon Thorensen was left in charge of the other three drivers, who were McElwain, Rich, and Charlie Stehlin. On my map I discovered that Besse-sur-Braie,

where Josette was staying with Claude and her mother, was only about thirty miles farther on. I could not resist the temptation. Surely they would wish to go to the south bank of the Loire, and I had ten gallons of gasoline in reserve with me. With their small car this would take them a long way.

It was lovely country that I sped through, this rich Touraine, the garden spot of France. And Besse was charming, situated in the midst of lush fields on the banks of a placid stream. I liked the place as soon as I saw it. Claude's mother was well known and a kindly inhabitant guided me to her home. There were roses blooming on the gate and the garden was a crazy-quilt of flowers. But the shutters were closed tight and the doors bolted. This stunned me, and for a moment I could not think. This was the last address Josette had given me. After Besse where would I find her in this war-stricken land? I pulled myself together and asked a neighbor when they had left. "On Saturday," she said. This was Monday, June 17. I was two days late. Had they left an address? No. They had only said that they were going to cross the Loire, probably at Amboise, which was the nearest

bridge. They had several places in mind, the woman told me, but she could remember no names. With only this information to follow I knew that a hunt was hopeless. Nevertheless, I drove to Amboise and combed the town without result. There were half a dozen roads leading out to the south, any one of which they might have taken; so, feeling completely crushed, I turned back in the direction of our camp.

When I arrived there I found the boys grouped around Grima Johnson's portable radio. Marshal Pétain was just beginning the historic speech in which he asked Hitler for the peace terms. The end was near. We had known it for some time, but we had not wanted to admit it, even to ourselves. Silently the gathering broke up, and I wandered off into the woods to be alone and think.

So it was nearly over. What did this mean? That the French had lost the war, of course. Why? I summed up all the reasons that came into my mind. Why had an army that was considered the greatest in the world folded like a Japanese fan? Because it was a 1918 army, with a High Command thinking in terms of World War I, against a 1940 German Army with a High Command thinking in

terms of tomorrow. Armies are not like brandy, which grows better as it grows older; they are like automobiles, and no one will dispute the fact that Henry Ford is building a finer car today than he did in 1918. An army, like an automobile, must go ahead with the times. The French had treated theirs like their finest brandy: they had allowed it to grow old and mellow in the wood. And the high command was even older and mellowier. And then there was the unfortunate Maginot Line, which gave a false sense of security, and was like building a fence on two sides of your garden and hoping that the neighbor's cows would not discover that the other two sides were wide open. It should have run to the English Channel, and even then it would not have kept the airplanes out. Another element that did a lot towards overthrowing France was the Frenchman's love of red tape and unnecessary paper work. Thousands of men spent thousands of hours writing out special passes for innocent people, annoying them generally, while fifth columnists were following the even tenor of their nefarious ways, unannoyed and well armed with cleverly forged papers. If the French had used this

wasted time in preparing themselves, things might have been different.

Then there was the element of luck. This element France had had against her from the beginning of the spring blitzkrieg. Perfect weather such as the country had not enjoyed in years favored the enemy bombers and motorized units, and caused the rivers to shrink as if purposely to aid Nazi engineers in spanning them with pontoon bridges. Most terrible of all were the refugees that blocked the roads, making it impossible for supply trains and reserves to reach the front. This last-named problem had certainly been one of the major causes of France's unexpected defeat. The Germans had not won the war, the French had lost it.

As I wandered alone through the woods, with hands dug deep into my pockets, and eyes cast on the ground, I spoke half aloud: "My France is crushed, overwhelmed—but never beaten."

The very terrestrial sound of our lunch bell came ringing through the woods and broke in on my thoughts. Smitty was the proud owner of this bell; it was his favorite war souvenir. He had taken it from over the gate we had been forced to tear

down the day of our arrival in Beauvais, and had carried it with all the care he would have bestowed on a precious object. It was the apple of his eye and no one else was permitted to ring it if he happened to be about. Today I knew from the violence with which the bell clanged that Mess Sergeant LeClair Smith, late of the 5th Marines, was on the job.

Luncheon was a silent affair. The usual chatter and banter were completely missing, and I knew that my friends realized as well as I the gravity and sadness of the moment.

It was from this luncheon that Herbert de Belle and I set out to look for the four drivers across the Loire, and instead of finding them ran into the German advance and were captured.

And this brings us back to the end of the first chapter of this book, and the sill of an open window in Étampes, where de Belle and I sat smoking and planning our getaway.



ESCAPE



## CHAPTER XIV

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### I OUTWIT OUR CAPTORS

FOR what seemed a very long moment Herbert de Belle and I sat on the window sill in Étampes, smoking, dangling our legs, watching the prisoners and guards across the road, and trying hard to look unconcerned. My plan for escape had now taken a definite form. It would be impossible to repass the German lines and join the Section. We could not hope to catch up with the rapidly advancing Huns on foot. Therefore we must go to Paris and ask protection of the American Embassy. There was only one fly in the ointment of my plan. For the life of me I could not remember the German word for ambassador. What the hell was it? . . . At first I could not think, and then, syllable by syllable, it began to come to my memory. Bo—boat—boatschafter (the spelling is by sound). Boatschafter! I had it. Without moving my lips I told de Belle to be on the alert. Good soldier that he

was, I knew that I could count on him to obey, and that he was one hundred per cent with me, no matter what mad scheme I might have devised. He had gone this far with me voluntarily; he would go all the way. There is a soldier, and a gentleman.

We watched the old guard march solemnly down the road and disappear around a bend in the direction of the prison camp where we had spent such an uncomfortable night. The sergeant of the new guard ordered the column to fall in, preparatory to continuing the route. He saw us sitting on the sill and yelled, "Hey, you two, fall in. Who do you think you are?" I took a long drag on my cigarette, and eyed him from head to foot. The moment had come and I needed all my wits. My heart beat a drumfire barrage inside, and outwardly I must be dead calm. Could I do it? *I must*. I had gotten de Belle into this mess, now it was up to me to get him out. Also I was thinking of myself, and the vision of a concentration camp passed before my eyes.

Then I blew out the smoke slowly, flicked my cigarette across the road, cleared my throat, and answered the sergeant. "If you will show more respect for an officer and come over here I shall be

glad to tell you who we are." My tone surprised him. It surprised me, too. I had sounded almost as arrogant as a Prussian captain. He came over, not knowing whether to be angry or to keep his place as my inferior in rank. I returned his salute in a leisurely manner. "We are," I began, and felt de Belle stiffen at my side. He did not understand German, but his training had been in the theatre and by instinct he knew that we were reaching a climax. "We are not in your prison column, and have never been prisoners. It just happens that we are here waiting for a car to take us to Paris. One of your officers promised it to us some time ago. He seems to have disappeared. We are American doctors and have received an urgent call from our ambassador, saying that we are needed in Paris. Can you find the officer who promised us the car? He was a tall, well-built blond fellow, with saber scars from duelling across his left cheek." The description was a facile invention, and might have fitted half the officers in the German Army.

"May I see your passports?" The sergeant was definitely softening. But I lived through a very nasty moment while he examined mine from cover to cover. In it was clearly written: "Occupation—

Journalist and photographer." The two words are uncomfortably similar in English and German. Luck, as usual, was with me and he did not notice this. "I have not time," he said, returning the passports, "to find the officer you speak of, Herr Ober Leutnant, but if you two gentlemen will walk along with me I shall stop the first car going towards Paris in which there is room." Even before the column moved off, a French ambulance, driven by a German, came along the road heading for Paris. The sergeant hailed it and ordered the driver to take us in.

"How's that?" I whispered to de Belle as we climbed on. "Look's all right to me," he answered, smiling. My cock-and-bull story had been so outrageously simple that it worked.

All the way up we passed German troops going towards the south. The field-gray line was unending, and they travelled fast in their beautifully kept motor vehicles, tanks, and armored cars. What we saw must have been the Panzer Divisions, the blitzkrieg troops, and their equipment was perfect. One had the impression that they knew how to use their guns, and that every man was trained to make the right move at the right time. If I had expected

to see thin, emaciated, underfed soldiers I was doomed to bitter disappointment. They were the finest looking group of men I ever saw, bar none, and very young. They were men who had been brought up mentally, morally, and physically from childhood for this moment when they would sweep over Europe. Watching them, as we passed, and studying their faces carefully, I knew that there was no army in existence that could stop them on land. If they could cross the Channel in any numbers they would take England, and if they could cross the Atlantic . . . It was the first time that this thought had come to me. God! Suppose they did conquer England and cross the Atlantic. Hitler is mad enough to try it. World domination is his aim. Any fool can see that. America was, I knew, totally unprepared for an invasion. The idea that such a thing could conceivably happen shocked me profoundly, and I determined that when I returned home I would preach arming to the teeth, on land, on the seas, and above all in the air. On the road to Paris it came to me with full force that if England falls, and I do not believe she will, there is only one thing which will save us from invasion, and that is strength. We must be so powerful that

Hitler will cower at the thought of attacking the United States. Like most bullies, and he has proved himself to be that on many occasions, he will not touch any one his size. Arm and be as strong as Germany and we need have no fears. Help England, for she is fighting the world's battle for freedom.

Our ambulance driver was a Rhinelander and fond of conversation. When he began to ask questions I took the matter in hand and did the talking myself. I mentioned places I had visited in his country, dwelt at some length on the excellence of the wines produced there, asked him what he thought of France, how he liked Paris, and anything else so as not to speak of ourselves. The less said the better on that subject. Life in Paris had not changed a bit, he informed me. I asked if he had been there before the war. No, but he was sure that it had not changed. I was not so sure. "Of course, it is a beautiful city," he said, "and so is Berlin a beautiful city. And we have Cologne and Munich and . . ." I could see that he was homesick and wished to go on speaking of the Fatherland, which suited me perfectly, and I listened politely while watching everything that we passed.



All along the road were scattered thousands of French helmets and gas masks, thrown there by the soldiers who had been taken prisoner. They would have no more use for them now, and had dropped them to lighten their loads. At some spots there were signs that violent fighting had taken place, which led me to believe that the French had put up a more gallant struggle than rumors led one to believe. But the Germans had been quick to carry away the dead, and bury them out of sight. Their game now was to make friends with the French and turn them against the English. This was obvious with the many refugees who were already retracing their steps towards the north. The German soldiers were very kind to them, taking them in trucks if they were on foot, giving them food, or, if they were in cars, supplying them with gasoline. All propaganda to swing them in line with the German way of thought as against the British. Give the Boche anything he wants and he is kind, provided it is to his interest to be kind; but try to block him, unless you are the stronger of the two, and see what happens.

The car stopped in front of a great stadium and my heart skipped a couple of beats. It was an ath-

letic grounds now being used as a concentration camp, probably the one that the column we had left at Étampes was heading for. Thousands of prisoners were sitting around on the playing field inside, sweltering under a burning sun. There was neither shelter from rain, nor shade to protect one from the sun. It was a ghastly sight and I felt the blood rush from my head and my knees weaken at the thought of being locked in there. I am sure the Christians did not fear being thrown to the lions in good old Roman days more than I dreaded the idea of entering this place for a stay of three or four months. At least these early Christians had the chance of becoming martyrs, and even a slight hope that the Virgins would give them a "thumbs up" break.

I asked the driver why we did not go on. "You must get permission here first from the Commander before you can enter Paris," he answered. So we were not out of it yet!

The Commander was not at the camp, and a guard escorted us to his house. He was having a nap, the orderly told us. He had been up late last night and was tired. We must wait until about three o'clock. To persuade our guard to go to a local pub

was an easy matter. We bought him rum, drank with him in the formal German manner, and talked, always keeping the subject as far away from ourselves as possible. Nor was this particularly difficult. I found that most of these fellows wanted to discuss only themselves, their country, their army and their Adolf Hitler. It was Adolf Hitler this, and Adolf Hitler that, and Adolf Hitler the other. They always used the two names and rarely spoke of the Fuehrer in any other way. I suppose it made them feel closer to him, on more intimate terms as it were.

Finally we were told that the Commander had arisen and would receive us. He was the first fat-bellied German of the old school that I had seen in the army. But he was not jolly, and I felt uncomfortable when he began to speak. The fact that he did not ask us to sit down, as would have been correct with officers of a non-enemy country, was a bad sign. "*Aber*, you were working with the French before we came," he said, and I agreed. "Therefore," he continued, "you are our enemies." Freedom Preferred was declining on the market. I assured him that we had cared for a great many German wounded, and that they had received the

same treatment in our hands as the French and English. Freedom Preferred went up a point, then down again. "*Aber*, you are in the French Army. The insignias on your lapels show that, and your friend has a French name." I pointed out that names meant absolutely nothing in the United States. Furthermore, I assured him that it was quite a coincidence that our medical corps insignia resembled that of the French transport. This was not true, but neither was anything else I had said all day.

After deep and lengthy consideration he dictated a pass, said we were free to proceed, and wished us a pleasant journey. Perhaps the fat belly stood for a jolly character after all, although I believe the real reason why he let us go so easily was because he did not wish to be bothered with any prisoners from neutral countries in his camp. They might cause investigations, and that would mean extra work and less time for afternoon naps. He was, however, the exception rather than the rule in the German Army. Most of the officers were overzealous in performing their duties.

Herbert and I were nearly through the door leading into the street when the Commander called

us back. This time my heart skipped three beats at least. "I have a French prisoner who has a very bad leg," he said. "Run over, or something. You are a doctor, so will you fix him up?" This was an emergency that I had not thought of in advance. "Of course, Commander. Glad to be of use to you."

I think I looked quite professional as I examined the poor devil. He was not in the camp itself, I was glad to say, but in a sort of temporary infirmary. I prayed silently that no German doctor would come in while I was making the examination. The leg was so swollen that nothing could be done, I told the Commander, until an X-ray was made, and added that I was sure it was a fracture and should be attended to as soon as the swelling subsided.

When we finally got away from the fat officer I was ringing wet with nervous perspiration. Nor could I show my relief, as the guard was still with us.

The same ambulance and driver were easily located, and with our pass we were soon in the suburbs of Paris. The driver said he had to go somewhere, he did not know exactly where, although he knew the streets to follow, and I told him that

it was surely not in our direction. If he would let us out we could catch a subway. We were then passing the Porte d'Orléans, a few hundred yards from our old home at the Cité Universitaire, and there was a train which would take us directly to within a short distance of the Embassy. I was delighted when he accepted, and glad to see the last of him. Until he was well away I guarded the suspicion that he had designs on our liberty, and secretly intended to have us clapped into a concentration camp.

I dived down joyously into the subway, closely followed by de Belle. Always before my dislike for anything underground, except wine cellars, had been violent. But no one was down there who seemed likely to tap me on the back and say, "Follow me, please." And the smell, one of the worst I know under ordinary circumstances, was like the finest perfume to my nostrils. It meant freedom, complete escape, at least for a short time. There was not a German in sight.

Between the exit from the subway and the Embassy we passed in front of my old hotel, the Crillon. Now it was heavily guarded by German troops and we had to go around. On sentry duty at the

front door were two helmeted soldiers, and their movements when they saluted a passing officer were as perfect as clockwork. The hotel, as well as all the other good ones, had been taken over by the invaders, and the general in command of Paris was there. He had landed the day of the occupation on the Place de la Concorde with his plane and had taxied to the entrance. Good theatre, it had been, and very effective.

Once across the threshold of the Embassy we felt really safe. A skeleton staff had remained and were feeling pretty heroic for having stayed at their well-paid posts when the Germans came in, despite the fact that Paris was an open city and would not be bombed, and that they were protected by all the international laws in existence. I do not know why it is that so many diplomatic people feel so heroic and sorry for themselves when they do their simple duty and partially earn the money paid them by hard-pressed taxpayers. One woman of the staff became positively obnoxious telling about the fact that she never left *her* post. One would have thought she had been in danger, when, the fact is, Paris was the safest place in all France.

Our faces fell when we were informed in a more or less "Get-the-hell-out-of-here" tone that we could go to the Hôtel Bristol, which the Embassy had reserved for Americans—provided they could pay the stiffish prices. I protested that we would surely be arrested walking about in uniform. "Not with your American passports," I was informed. We had gone about one hundred yards when we were pulled in. Our pass from the Commander got us free from this, and we dashed back to the shelter of the Embassy. "Listen," I said, "we're camping here for the rest of the war, or until we get some civilian clothes, whether you like it or not." They obviously did not like it.

Lady Luck again passed our way in the form of charming Olivia Chambers, at present courageously working with the American Red Cross as a volunteer. She understood our plight, which is more than could be said of the Embassy staff, and told us to wait there. Well-meant advice, but useless, as wild elephants could not have moved us. She dashed off on her bicycle and presently returned with a bulging rucksack on her back. "There," she said, flushed and lovely, out of breath from her effort. "Two complete outfits of civvies. A friend asked



me to watch his apartment while he is in the army, and I'm sure he would be delighted to know that his clothes are serving such a good purpose." Never have I been more thankful for an act of kindness, never have I appreciated one more. We needed something like this from our own country people. Herb and I changed in the washroom downstairs.

## CHAPTER XV

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### IN OCCUPIED PARIS

ONCE in civilian clothes, Herbert de Belle and I went about Paris unmolested, although my knees frankly shook every time a German came into the hotel. All said and done, we were escaped prisoners and would be checked up on sooner or later. Happily for me it was much later. The Field Service office in New York received word through diplomatic channels from the German high command, stating that they held me prisoner in Germany, and would release me provided my passage money was guaranteed. This message arrived eight days after I did! So, as far as I know, I am still on Nazi records as a prisoner of war, and whether they "free" me or not is a matter of small importance.

It was June 18 when we arrived in Paris. We had been captives in German hands for twenty-four hours, and each hour had seemed like a year. I felt

that much older, and my nerves were definitely bad. The people in the hotel, good, kindly souls, annoyed me terribly. I wanted to be alone, and yet I wanted companionship. In fact I did not know what I wanted. I was thoroughly disagreeable to every one with whom I came into contact, and yet I longed for friends. Herbert was a great help. He was younger and less high-strung than I, but I kept away from him, not wishing to annoy him with my damnable humor. A sweet young thing, of what one used to call the Dumb Dora type, asked me, "Was it interesting?" I thought she was looking for a cheap thrill. "Jesus Christ!" I said, and walked away. Another woman, whom I had known before the war, inquired about an ancient love affair, how it was going, and so forth. I told her she was a curious old maid, and for God's sake to leave me alone. She did, from then on. Soon the only person, besides de Belle, in the hotel who would speak to me was Victor, the funny little head-waiter and unofficial barman. His son had escaped at Dunkerque, and he understood my feelings. He always brought me second helpings at table, and tried to feed me up, which was useless. I could not eat. Nor could I drink. Three Scotch and

sodas made me drunk. Heretofore I had always thought I could hold the stuff pretty well.

For two days I drifted along, half-intoxicated and completely jittery. Then I pulled myself together. I had a long talk with Wayne Taylor, competent head of the American Red Cross in France. There was no work that I could do with him for the moment, as he was unable to receive supplies from America. He did not believe that there would be a famine in France, the country was too rich, but certainly there would be great hardships during the coming winter if aid could not be received from America.

At the American Hospital in Neuilly I had better luck. Both Doctor Gros and Mr. Close, head physician and director respectively, knew me and knew the work of the Section. They had several ambulances and touring cars that had been donated, with which they were carrying food out to the prison camps and refugees. Would I take charge of the transportation problem? Naturally I accepted this offer, happy to be once more serving a useful cause, and to be busy so that I would not have much time to think.

Two of my men, who had been patients at the

hospital when the Germans came and were therefore unable to rejoin the Section, were already on the job and could help me a great deal. One was Frank Hamlin, still hobbling from his accident at Beauvais, and the other was George Folds. His ribs had healed after the car turned over with him, but he had not been well. Now they were both performing valuable service.

Doctor de Martel, the chief surgeon, and one of the world's greatest brain specialists, had committed suicide the night before the German occupation. It is likely that he was unable to stand the idea of a hated enemy marching with their hob-nailed boots through the streets of the city he loved. Otherwise, the atmosphere of the hospital was cheerful enough.

The ambulance driver who had brought de Belle and me up from Étampes could not have been more wrong than when he said that life in Paris went on as before. Only the houses and monuments remained unchanged, and even many of these were desecrated with large Nazi flags. The first day after their arrival the Germans had even hung their emblem on the Arc de Triomphe, over the tomb of France's unknown soldier, and surpris-

ingly enough some one in high position had the good taste to have it removed. It would have surprised me less if they had had the unknown soldier removed and left the flag. Delicacy of feeling has never been a fine art with the Hun.

There were not many people in Paris. In fact it was still practically empty of Parisians, but they were returning, and from one day to the other the difference was evident. Cafés were opening and they were filled with German soldiers and officers. Beer was hard to get, as these unwelcome guests were drinking it all, and none was being brewed. Restaurants were also full of them, as were the shops that had opened, and everything was being paid for with paper marks, which had been declared legal currency at ten francs to a mark. Life was cheap for the Germans, and I noticed that the most sought after articles were women's silk lingerie and stockings, which led me to believe that luxuries of this type for the fair sex must be rather scarce in the Fatherland.

There were two divisions, about forty thousand men, of enemy troops occupying the capital, and they were everywhere. They loitered along the streets, chatting gaily in their guttural tongue, smil-

ing and smirking with their ugly, cruel faces. Paris! They had conquered Paris, and their expressions showed it with a universally horrid look of satisfaction. They were correct because they had orders to be correct, not because it was their natural instinct. The high command wished to have the French well impressed by the good behavior of the soldiers, so that they would love the good Germans and hate the bad English. I do not believe that many Frenchmen were fooled. They are too clever for that; they knew what these soldiers of occupation would do the moment they were no longer held in check.

Up and down the avenues they goose-stepped in mass formations, bands playing, or, if there were no bands, singing their harsh military songs. They loved it. It was their life. Even in civilian life they go about in groups singing. They have no individuality, but must do everything in mass formation. I could not help drawing a mental comparison between this war-loving race of barbarians and the peace-loving nation that they had overrun. One thinks only of conquest, destruction, and revenge, while the other wishes to be let alone and allowed to live beautifully in peace and happiness. It is

amazing how two peoples, so close geographically, can be so utterly far apart in taste and nature. One the brute, the other a lover of the beautiful.

Efficient Dorothy Reader, harassed by the job of looking out for the Americans in the Hôtel Bristol which the Embassy had wished on her, was doing the work splendidly, and this was no sine-cure. She had to pacify nervous customers, whose wants were numerous and often unreasonable, and at the same time hold the German Army at bay. Time and again officers came in to requisition at least part of the place, only to be defeated by Miss Reader and the manager. The hotel was full of Americans, she would point out, who after all had the right to exist. She was very correct, but very firm about it all.

Roy Porter, the Associated Press representative, who had stayed on in Paris without considering himself as heroic as the Embassy staff, often came in for cocktails or meals, and he did me a great favor. The unknown gentleman whose clothes I was wearing had uncommonly large feet and narrow shoulders, with the result that I had difficulty getting into his coat, and equal difficulty not losing his shoes at every step. I had two suitcases full



of clothes at the Cité Universitaire, but no means of transporting them to the hotel. Roy had a small car, and a mysterious source of gasoline. He solved the problem by most kindly taking me to the Cité in his car and bringing back the suitcases. This may sound like a small thing, but in a town where there are no taxis, and where gasoline is more valuable than gold, more sought after than diamonds, it takes on important proportions.

One of the most annoying things in Paris was the curfew. Every one, except Germans, had to be at home by ten o'clock. There was the usual hour of daylight saving, and to this the Nazis had added another hour, so as to be on German time. Therefore, the closing hour for outside life was eight o'clock by the sun. During these, the longest days of the year, the sun had not set when one had to scurry home. That made dining with friends, or having friends dine with you, out of the question. For us this meant staying in the hotel at night, whether we liked it or not. Nor were the black-out regulations lifted. The Germans explained that they were now necessary on account of the British menace.

The day I was to take over my duties at the

American Hospital the Armistice was signed. Mr. Osborn was there, and would handle this work as well as, perhaps better than I could, and I decided to try and find the Section. Herbert de Belle was of my opinion. We were really not needed in Paris. In fact, now that the war was over for France we probably were not needed anywhere, but our desire to get back to our outfit and see what had happened was natural. Only five days had elapsed since our capture. However, in five days of this warfare many things can pass.

We discussed ways and means. First, we must have the necessary military papers to go through the German lines. There was a broken-down car that had been salvaged, which we could have for transportation, and we knew where we could get enough gasoline to take us as far as Tours. After that we would have to shift for ourselves. Well, we could handle that. We were used to standing on our own feet. The question of the pass was another matter. This would have to be done through the Germans, and to explain our presence in Paris might prove embarrassing. "Nothing ventured . . ." I said, and de Belle nodded. We would have to take a chance on that. I wondered if our luck could

possibly hold out much longer. It seemed inevitable that it must break sometime. My experience has always been that if you want something it is better to go to the top, so I went to the Hôtel Crillon and asked for the commanding General. Here, at least, I learned how the sentries did their present-arms salute to officers with such clockwork precision. Without moving his lips one of them hissed the time to each movement. From a distance it was most effective, but from close up it lost much of its charm. Such stolid fellows to be hissing at each other. Of course, I did not get to the General, but the mere fact that I asked for him made an impression and I was told to go to the Hôtel Meurice, where certain high officials were quartered, and where I would obtain what I wished.

There was more hissing of sentries as I passed into the Hôtel Meurice. I told my story to a very young and efficient colonel, head of the medical corps in the Paris area. That is, I told part of my story, saying only that de Belle and I had been separated from our ambulance corps, and not mentioning anything about capture and subsequent escape. I explained that we would like to look for the Section and, now that the war was ended in

France, work with the refugees. He asked to see my papers and I handed him my passport. He examined it carefully, then asked for my other papers. Here I made a bad slip, and bit my underlip almost until the blood came, I was so annoyed with myself. "The Germans took them," I said, without thinking. He placed my passport behind his back, stiffened, and looked hard at me. "The Germans would not have done that without a reason. Your passport does not show that you are what you say you are—the leader of an ambulance section. How do I know who and what you are if you have no other papers?"

Life for me, in this uncertain time, seemed to be a matter of getting out of one scrape and into another in as rapid succession as was humanly possible. I believe, however, that all this did a little something to sharpen a rather mediocre wit, and I am sure that it advanced my standing as a liar from second to first class. "But," I said, inventing as I went along, "the Germans are only holding my papers at Tours. I shall call for them on my way south. As for my identity, sir, you have only to call Ambassador Bullitt on the phone and he will

tell you who I am." He started towards the phone and I swallowed hard. I did not know whether Bullitt was in Paris or not, and felt perfectly sure that he had never even heard of me. Heretofore, I had never had a great deal of interest in ambassadors, thinking them rather stuffy people who sometimes wore high silk hats and well-cut morning coats.

Before he arrived at the telephone the Colonel changed his mind. Or perhaps he was bluffing to see what my reaction would be. Anyway, he appeared to be satisfied with my conduct, and dictated a pass. It could not have been more exactly what I wanted if I had dictated it myself. It gave me authority to come and go as I pleased, and to lead a column of ambulances anywhere within German-occupied territory at any hour of the day or night. Furthermore it requested German authorities, both civil and military, to grant me all assistance within reason. The speed with which this was done left me bewildered, and I could not help drawing a comparison between his efficiency and the absolute lack thereof with which I so often came into contact when dealing with French offi-

cials. My poor, beloved French could certainly learn something from their hereditary enemy across the Rhine.

In parting, the Colonel advised me. in fact practically ordered me, to wear civilian clothes on my return trip. But Herbert and I had come up in uniform, and we decided to return in uniform. With the paper I now had the risk was not great, and we felt that it was more dignified. I should never have returned to the Section in civilian clothes. That would, I felt, have been an admission of personal defeat.

The car was at the door and we were ready to start. One more small, but to me very important, thing had to be attended to. I asked de Belle to wait and walked as fast as I could down the Faubourg St. Honoré, into Hermès, and ordered their best Sam Browne belt. It took a few minutes to punch the holes and fit it, and when I walked out wearing the belt I felt ever so much better. Small things like that do a great deal to affect one's morale, even in the midst of the most important happenings. France had fallen, the Armistice had been declared, the greatest war of history was still to come, yet I was

able to feel an immense personal satisfaction because I had a better belt than the one the German officer stole off my very body.

When I returned to the car de Belle smiled, but said nothing. We had luncheon in Versailles, then headed south for Tours.

## CHAPTER XVI

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### ACROSS THE SPANISH BORDER

It mattered little what road one took or in what direction one went; the Germans were everywhere, millions of them, overrunning France like an army of busy, efficient ants at a picnic. I am the first one to admire the good qualities of the ant, of which I possess none, but I dislike them immensely. And so I disliked this invading army in gray, looking so out of place in the beautiful, green countryside.

As we passed through the rich farming country of Touraine and saw the broad, well-planted fields without the sturdy peasants at work in them, I could not help wondering if Wayne Taylor was right about there being no danger of famine. Certainly if the crops were lost and no food could be imported through the British blockade there was a great danger of acute hunger. I did not believe that the French had built up a sufficient re-



serve supply of food to last them through the winter. In 1922 I had seen the famine in Soviet Russia, where I was serving as inspector with Herbert Hoover's Relief Administration; had seen hundreds of thousands die of hunger and diseases which follow it; had seen cannibalism rampant. Could this happen to France? I asked myself this question time and again. Perhaps it would not be as bad as in Russia, but certainly the Boche would take all for himself, and the French people would have to do the best they could, to shift for themselves with what the Germans left. Rich, beautiful France accepting crumbs from the barbarian's table! The thought brought a lump to my throat.

Our car went lame before we arrived in Tours, and we forced it to limp along painfully. The town, especially down near the river, had been very badly bombed, and there were whole sections that had been wiped out entirely by explosions and fire. Night was not far away and we looked around for a place to dine and sleep. Neither food nor lodging, however, was obtainable. The Hôtel de l'Univers, where I had always stayed, was taken over by the Germans, as was everything else. I wondered if there could be any of them left in Germany. It

seemed to me that there could not be, and I thought it might be a good idea to go there to get away from them.

The Château de Candé was only about six miles out in the country, and I remembered that a part of the Paris Embassy staff was there, especially one fellow whom I liked very much; so we decided to ask him for a night's hospitality. What we would do for transportation to continue our journey I did not know. Certainly the car we had would soon be gasping its last breath. Well, tomorrow would be another day. We must take our hurdles as we came to them, and our present hurdle was to find a place to pass the night, and food if possible.

The Château de Candé has a history centuries old, but the most recent event of importance there, an event that brought it world-wide fame, was the marriage of an American girl to the King and Emperor who had abdicated the most powerful throne in the world for her. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor were married at Candé. I found my friend, and his welcome was sincere and charming. Of course, he could put us up. Did we need a wash before coming to the salon for cocktails? Definitely we did.

There were quite a few people gathered in the magnificent salon for cocktails. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Bedaux, were there and could not have received us more graciously. The others were Embassy attachés and their wives, and two or three refugees. It was a grand feeling to stand about, drinking cold Martinis and chatting in one's own language among friends, and seemingly far away from the war and the Huns. There was only one reminder of the war, and that could be seen through the window down in the valley to the southwest. It was a brown spot covering about five acres of forest, and was an eye-sore. A gunpowder factory had been built there, well hidden by the trees, and the French had blown it up before the arrival of the enemy. Mr. Bedaux told me that he had thought the explosion would cause the Château to tumble in ruins, but though it had trembled slightly it had withstood the shock.

Next morning the car refused to move. Not a kick or a cough could we get from it. The battery was dead, the coil was dead—the car was dead. We would abandon it, and would thumb our way in search of the Section. Our general plan was to head for Saintes, near Bordeaux, which was the last ad-

dress we had had of the Paris staff. After that we would have to see what happened in case they were no longer there. At Tours we could perhaps find transportation in the direction we wished to go. One of the Embassy people kindly took us as far as the main road and dropped us. Herbert de Belle had seen a Red Cross flag a few hundred yards back and we walked there. It was a German hospital unit. I showed my pass from the Hôtel Meurice to the commanding officer and explained that we would like transportation to Tours. I told him the object of our trip, and that we were headed for Saintes. "Better than Tours," he said. "I have an officer here who is going to Poitiers, which is nearly half way to Saintes. He has room and will be glad to take you that far." Evidently this slip of paper from Paris had a magic touch, and the man could not have been more obliging. He insisted that we join him and his colleagues for luncheon.

It is probably bad form to look a gift luncheon in the teeth, but I must say that the only good thing about this one was the French wine, pillaged no doubt from the cellar of the house in which the officers were quartered. However, neither de Belle nor I could throw stones on this score, having too

recent memories of the Château at Bouffemont, where we had been entertained by an absent host. The food consisted of a sort of greasy soup, nourishing and unpalatable bread, and a can of tunny fish. The Commander explained that officers of the German Army ate the same rations as the soldiers, and I could well believe it. But as the Germans have never known what it is to live and eat well, I suppose they did not suffer from this poor fare. A French soldier would have turned up his nose in disgust. The Frenchman likes to live well and in peace; the German does not know how to live well, and that may explain his preference for war.

There was one charming officer, a doctor from Vienna, and while the others were formally correct, they appeared stiff and ordinary by comparison with the Austrian. I was careful to hide my dislike for the Germans, and answered their rapid fire of questions politely. They were very curious about many things, especially America's attitude. Naturally I did not tell them that I believed the United States to be 100 per cent anti-Nazi, and that I hoped my country would soon be in the war on the side of freedom. They told me that

Adolf Hitler had no designs on America. As I had heard the Fuehrer say exactly the same thing over the radio about Czechoslovakia, Holland, Poland, Belgium, France, and a few other countries, I did not take much stock in this statement about ourselves.

It was then, and is now, my firm conviction that the Madman of Munich is out to dominate the world, and if England does not stop him, America must. That is why we should be helping England now. I am not particularly pro-English, and I have found their politics and diplomacy deplorable since 1918, but I am wholeheartedly for liberty, or in other words, anti-Nazi. It would be an easier matter to defeat Germany fighting at England's side now, than later alone in case England is defeated. Hitler and his gang should be so completely wiped out that our sons and our sons' sons will be allowed to live in peace, happiness, and, above all, freedom—the world's greatest heritage. Hitler is like a prizefighter, taking on nations instead of boxers. His policy is to crush one at a time, beginning with the smaller and weaker ones, and working up, growing stronger and more experienced all the while, until he is finally ready to meet the

champion for the title of World's Heavyweight Dominator. He will not stop until he is at the top of the list, unless England can put across the knock-out punch that will lay him low for the full count.

I was glad when the luncheon was over. My hosts had not been intentionally disagreeable.. They had merely showed a surprising amount of the famous Teutonic bad taste in posing embarrassing questions and forcing me to think up one lie after the other throughout the meal. On the whole I suppose this was a small price to pay for the sixty or seventy miles of transportation which we were to receive afterwards.

The officer who took us to Poitiers should have been an aviator. No one would ever have shot him down, judging by the way he swooped and swerved. If he missed trucks, or tanks, or anything on the road by more than an inch he must have been disappointed in his ability as a driver, and would try, it seemed to me, to avenge himself by touching the next thing he came to without causing a very serious accident. If by chance his unhappy victims happened to be French he would yell insults at them, but if they were his own people he remained silent. It made me very nervous when

he shouted long propaganda speeches into my ear, instead of watching the road, and I learned for the Nth time what a fine fellow Adolf Hitler was, what great good he had done for Germany, and what great good he (Hitler), with the German nation behind him, was going to do for the world. Under my breath I thanked him kindly, and said that personally I did not want any part of it. Out loud I said, "*Ja, ja*," and let it go at that.

Several times we were forced to make long detours on account of blown bridges. And finally, much to my relief, we arrived in the outskirts of Poitiers. The officer missed his way, and was trying to get into the center of town when I saw a familiar-looking car, painted Field Service gray, coming towards us. As it passed I recognized Jack Brant, of the Paris headquarters, driving, and the car was his staff car. I yelled at the top of my lungs, and instead of stopping he speeded up. The officer understood, turned and gave chase, catching Brant with the skill of an aviator. Jack was with Peter Jackson, one of the Second Section drivers who did not have the good, or bad, luck to get to the front. They were looking for us, but had not recognized me when I yelled. Seeing a German car



they had thought they were being arrested and speeded up, hoping to get away.

Our fantastic luck was still holding. Had our officer not missed his way we would probably never have found Brant, who was just passing through the town to continue his search. Now at least the problem of transportation was solved. They had left the headquarters outfit at Dax, in the Pyrénées, and set out to search for de Belle and me, as well as for the Section, of which they had had no news since leaving Vouvray.

That night we passed in a quiet little village off the beaten track where the Germans had not as yet penetrated, and it seemed like old times. We almost forgot that the enemy had overrun the country and that we (de Belle and I) had ever been in a German concentration camp. We drank wine and joked with the patron's daughters and tried to forget, if only for a few hours. This was the first taste I had had of the pre-war rural France, which I loved, for many months—good food, good wine, good living. God bless it, my rural France.

Early next morning we headed for Bordeaux. From there we would go south to trace the headquarters outfit, which Brant assured me would be

well ahead of the Germans, who had announced their intention of occupying the northern half of France and the Atlantic coast. On our route we would zigzag through the country, searching everywhere for the Section. I was questioning an official in front of the mayor's office of a small town, asking if any of our ambulances had passed that way, when a small German soldier came up, clicked his heels, and saluted. Étampes and the prison camp seemed so far away that I did not at first recognize my Bavarian guard. When he finally saw that I remembered him he asked, "How did you get away, Mr. American?" I felt pretty safe with the paper I had in my pocket from the Hôtel Meurice, and winked. "I think I told you that I didn't like your hotels, and intended to take my leave shortly." He skipped that with a smile, and continued. "And what do you think of our army now that you have seen more of it?" "I still think it's too damned good," I answered.

The Germans were taking over Bordeaux the day after we arrived, so we did not linger there. We collected Quigley, who had been separated from the Section, but not from his beloved truck, and Peter Powell, who had been running what he

called a "flop house" for the American Red Cross. He was headquarters and had been left there to round up any one who came in. The "flop house," he said, had entertained some surprisingly notable guests, including at least one American-born princess. I think he really hated to leave this work.

The town was crowded to a point where it was almost impossible to fight one's way into a café or restaurant. All of France seemed to be there, and it was not a question of a shortage of food, but a shortage of space. Finally we got a table on the terrace of a restaurant and were having luncheon when I saw a familiar face across the street. It was the captain who had been in charge of the railway station at Beauvais. Many an hour we had spent walking up and down the platform chatting together while the ambulances unloaded, many a raid we had weathered in each other's company, and the last time I had seen him he was standing, covered with dirt and dust, in front of the demolished station. He appeared to be so glad to see me that it gave me a great kick, and kept repeating to several officers who were with him how I had come to the ruined and burning station, saluted, and asked, "Mon Capitaine, are there any wounded?" It must

have been the salute, which I had given automatically and without thinking, that made such an impression, because each time he told the story he was careful to repeat it. Although I was in the midst of my meal nothing would do but that I must have a drink with the captain and his friends.

From Bordeaux we headed inland. It was better to get out of occupied territory, and we could look for the Section on our way south in search of headquarters. We would swing around to Dax and try to trace from there.

No sign of the Section anywhere, but we found headquarters comfortably installed in a château at Pau. That night we held a long conference, and it was decided that Brant would return to America next day by way of Bilbao or Lisbon. On his way he could find out about transportation for any members of the Field Service who wished to go back. Pete Jackson, de Belle, and I would take him as far as the International Bridge at Hendaye, and then continue our search for the Section.

Exactly where my duty lay began to worry me very much at this point. Before, I had not had time to think of it. Of course, the first thing was to locate the Section, but after that I was at a loss

which path I should follow. There were only two, but they led in very different directions. One kept me in France, the other led me to the United States. I really felt that once I had found the Section my work in France was ended. I could use the cars to work with the refugees, but there would now be millions of demobilized soldiers who could do that, and I would only be consuming food. Then, I could get no more money from America, and certainly could not make any. My great problem here was Josette. I did not want to leave her, and as she was French I could not take her with me. Yet to stay in France with no money was impossible, and I would only have been a burden. Besides, I had not the vaguest idea where she was. On the other hand, I am an American and felt that my real duty lay there. We had had no news for weeks, and did not know how our country stood on the question of war. Brant argued that it would be better to return to the States, see what was happening, then get a fresh running-start and jump back into the war somewhere else in case America was not coming in. I do not know when I have had such a difficult time coming to a decision, and finally I favored America and a fresh running-start.

We took Brant to St. Jean de Luz bright and early the next morning. After seeing him off we would comb unoccupied France for the Section. I planned to start at the spot where de Belle and I had left them the day of our capture, and work back and forth across the country like a good bird dog until we found them.

But once again our unbelievable luck came forward and saved us the trip. The first link in the chain of coincidence was Brant's difficulty getting across the International Bridge. We wanted to see him off, and waited until well into the afternoon, when he finally received permission to leave France. It was by then too late for us to start on our journey through France, and we made up our minds to pass the night in St. Jean and leave at dawn. There was time before dinner for a drink and we went to the best bar in St. Jean. However, it depressed us, and we ran over to Sonny's Bar at Biarritz for a quick one. Had Brant left on time, or had the bar in St. Jean been more amusing, we would not have been sitting in Sonny's when Willis and Watts walked in a few minutes after our arrival, but would have hunted for them in the center of France perhaps for weeks. The Section,

except for the four cars left on the other side of the Loire the morning of my capture, and Quigley, were all there, camped on a byroad a few kilometers outside of the town. Naturally I rushed out to say hello.

Next morning the miracle of miracles happened. I was walking down the main street of Biarritz when I saw four light-gray ambulances lined up in front of the American Consulate. They were our cars, the four I had left on the north bank of the Loire. All four together. The first man to show up was good old McElwain, closely followed by Thorensen, Stehlin, and Rich. Except for the fellows lost at Amiens, Section One of the American Field Service was intact. My work, I felt now, was completed and I would return to America.

Most of the boys were of the same mind, including Harold Willis, and the general consensus of opinion was that we should go to America and find out what was happening.

There was a certain amount of trouble at the International Bridge for those of us who wanted to cross over. First, there was the consular official who was constantly rushing off because he was late for breakfast, luncheon, or dinner. It did not mat-

ter what hour of the day he arrived; he was always late for some meal, hence always in too much of a hurry to bother about our little problems. They might have meant life or death without mattering to our friend, who had to have his ham and eggs at a certain hour, or else the world was all wrong.

Everything was in order finally. Our passports were visaed, and even the Spaniards had consented to receive us, much against their will, when the Germans closed the frontier for no apparent reason. Tired of it all, we went for a swim. While we were in the cool water some friend advised that the frontier was again opened, and we rushed off half dressed, to see if this were true. It was. I stayed at the bridge to try and hold it open, while Willis hurried back to collect the Section members who were leaving, and to pay the bills. When he returned, by a stroke of our customary luck, the bridge was still open and we crossed.

I did not turn for a final look at France. The swastika was floating over the sign of the French customs, and I could not stand to have that as a last memory. When I shall see my beloved France again she must be free from the tread of the hob-nailed boot of the Hun—in short, she must be free.













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